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Kleon of the Golden Sun

BY ED EARL REPP

REAMS' place was near the railroad station where the dust and cinders from coughing locomotives settled gently and sootily upon his window casements, and the atmosphere inside his shop was filled with the rank odor of burning coal and Diesel fuel more than that of his own oil paints.

Here when times were lean and money for art supplies went to buy bread, hard-up artists brought their unwilling feet; hence, they departed in sorer finances than ever, but possessing a few days' supply of canvas and oils and brushes. And here Timothy Saxon had come tonight, broke and desperate.

With a gold pocket knife, Reams scraped away under his horny finger nails while old Timothy leaned on his splayed hands on the counter and pleaded with him.

"Four weeks—that's all I ask!" the sculptor implored. "Four weeks—until after the Exposition. Then you'll have double your money for waiting."

Reams looked at him balefully from eyes the color of cold aluminum. He was a large man with white, spongy hands and a face of the same texture.

"Then I'll be out my tools for good, you mean," he snorted. "If I gave you a child's chance of winning a prize in the Exhibition, I might take the risk. But—pah!

Too many *good* sculptors will be entering their pieces." His sarcasm made old Timothy flinch. Red splotches leaped to the sculptor's cheek bones.

Timothy's eyes dropped. His fingers rubbed over the set of cheap sculptor's chisels spread out on the counter. Then, suddenly, the long fingers clutched a claw-chisel up as if it had been a dagger. Reams made a gulping sound and almost fell off his stool. Murder seethed in Saxon's eyes, and the thick, square-lensed glasses magnified them until they were like chunks of burning slag. But they were looking clear through the art dealer.

"Thieves! Scoundrels!" he choked. "I leave my room unlocked for one hour. So! They sneak in and rob me of the one thing I must have if I am to eat—my tools! And I with my last penny spent to buy a block of marble—"

His thin shoulders shook, and he wagged his head as he laid the chisel down on the canvas case. "Ten dollars—for a month. It's not much, Reams. And I tell you I shall win this year! First Prize winner in the Fine Arts Exposition! It came to me in a dream. 'Do a statue of Peace,' a voice said. 'The Messiah, on his knees, arms uplifted, his face turned to the sky—' I can see it in my mind—the radiance of a new-born star in his face. . . .his fingers. . . .the eyes—" Saxon's fingers seemed to work at invisible clay.

"Pah!" Reams grunted his bulk from the stool and began wrapping the chisels. "You've never done a good statue, Saxon, and you never will." He turned, stowing the set of sculptor's tools in a cupboard behind the counter. In the dark, musty room the only sounds were Timothy's heavy breathing and the whispering of many clocks. Reams' place was a combination art and antique shop. Bits of archaic furniture rubbed shoulders about

the floor. A score of clocks, ranged about the walls, noisily nibbled at the edges of eternity. Many canvases and a few marble busts, some good, some atrocious, stood about on easels and stands.

Timothy watched him lay the precious tools away. Because some vandal had stolen his own chisels this morning, he was helpless to earn a penny. But even so, he knew that with the best tools in the world he could not carve the statue that was in his mind. Somewhere, during the years, dreams and art and whiskey had become deplorably confused. It was written in his features that he was a failure. His faded mustache was always out of trim, and his black eyebrows grew as rank as ivy. Timothy was a long man and a poorly-looking one, but underneath his wrinkled suit were lean muscles. Sculptors work hard at their trade.

All at once he jerked erect.

"Wait—those!" He was pointing at a box, the top of which was broken, exposing rusted chisels beneath.

Reams looked around, startled. "Those aren't for sale," he grunted. He slammed the cupboard door.

Puzzled, Timothy scowled over the tops of his silver-rimmed glasses. "Those rusty old things? I'll give you four dollars."

A vast scorn raised itself to its full height in the art dealer's face. "Four dollars! Rusty old things, eh?"

He turned, reopened the locker, and brought the box to the counter. Peering closely toward the door, then into every shadowed corner as though fearing interlopers, he laid back the broken cover. Timothy saw that the wood was stained and worm-eaten.

An obstetrician might have handled a new-born babe as Reams dealt with those marred, corroded chisels. He

placed them neatly in a line on the glass: sharp punches; square-, curved-edge, and claw-chisels; drills. Altogether, an incomplete and battered collection of instruments. Timothy thought they looked home-made.

"Three dollars!" he snorted.

Reams did not hear the insult. He was turning a curved-edge chisel in his hands. At length he grunted under his breath.

"There! What do you see?" He handed the chisel to Timothy Saxon.

The sculptor made out only a string of letters crudely scratched on the side of the rusted bar. He began to spell them out:

B—u—o... Buona... Buonarroti. *Buonarroti!*" He looked up, his face like a smear of flour. "Michael Angelo Buonarroti! No! It—it's not possible!

Reams snaked the chisel back into the box, smiling slyly at Timothy. "The great Michelangelo—yes! Rusty old things, eh?"

"Where—where did—?" Timothy croaked.

"Where did I get them? I have ins and outs, my friend. Suffice it to say that I—Reams—possess the chisels with which the immortal Michelangelo carved his 'Moses', his 'David,' his 'Bound Slaves'—!"

Timothy Saxon, quaking as with a chill, heard the door slam on the priceless instruments. His brain whirled and spun. "What—how much—?" he faltered.

Reams looked at the ceiling, laughing silently with an oscillation of his fat stomach. "sell them? *Those!*" He tossed his white hands. Then, recalling something, he frowned. "By the way," he said, "there's an interesting little story that goes with those chisels. They say that Michelangelo gave them some kind of a blessing after he finished his 'Moses'. That every sculptor who uses them

will turn out pieces far superior to his usual work. You know Traggioni? How he produced only one lasting work? I have it that Traggioni somehow secured the chisels and did his marvelous 'Mourner'. After that they were stolen, and Traggioni was once more drudge."

Timothy Saxon was nodding, mouth agape. It did not even occur to him to question the authenticity of the chisels. They had a look of genuine antiquity about them.

"A hundred dollars—?" he croaked.

Reams' face worked. "Sacrilege to the memory of the greatest artist who ever lived!" he grated.

Timothy knew he had to have those chisels. They would coax from his fingers the genius that really lay there. He saw himself turning out the greatest statue since Michelangelo had made the marble fly with these self-same tools. "Two hundred?" he breathed.

Reams put his hands flat on the glass. "If someone came in here and laid before me five hundred dollars cash, I might take it," he said sourly. "But to give them to a—a hack like you—*on credit!*" His voice hit an incredulous note, and he waved a hand at the door. "Get out, Saxon. I've got work to do. Sometime when you have five hundred dollars—" Grinning ironically, he turned away.

So Timothy knew the chisels would never be his. Five hundred... a fortune. The starch was out of him, and he stumbled from the shop.

Timothy Saxon's room was a draughty hole in a flea-bag of a tenement. Five flights up, the wind was off the fish markets and the light came through a single, soapy pane. There was no carpet. The planks were white with marble dust and dry clay. Bits of sculpture dotted the room; mediocre efforts at best. In the center of the floor

squatted a block of marble yet to be scratched by a chisel.

Timothy dragged a bottle of cheap whiskey from a cupboard. Liquor was alike his only pleasure and his sole vice. But tonight the stuff had a cloying taste on his tongue. Chin in hand, he sat at the table, staring at the chunk of marble.

As he watched it, the clumsy outlines seemed to dissipate, and he saw his statue—the kneeling Messiah. Gleaming like white alabaster, it lighted up the whole room. On the table-top, Timothy began to sketch hurriedly. Then, with a sigh, he flung the pencil down. “What use?” he groaned. Because of Reams’ rapacity, he could never make the phantom real.

It was an hour or two after he went to bed that Timothy Saxon had his vision.

He had had them before; wraiths that squeezed from the necks of empty bottles. Lately, though—

There was his vision of last week. He had gone to sleep watching a gold star twinkle just above the gas-works. Every night he went to sleep watching the star. It had become a symbol of the ideals he had hung high in his youth, that he could never reach. In a dream he had the crazy notion that this star spoke to him. With master tongue, it described the statue he was to do for the Fine Arts Exposition. Peace, pleading with heaven. Magnificent! Timothy awoke in a sweat and made preliminary sketches.

Tonight it was that same star. When he saw it begin to glide from its place in the heavens he knew he was dreaming. Because it came swooping down the sky and popped right into his room! There it hung above the bed and —smiled at him!

Smiled? How else could he interpret the benevolent

glow that emanated from it? Flashing, spinning, it shimmered brilliant beams into every dark corner. Ruby, emerald, gold, sapphire— The slow-witted old sculptor was terrified. He put his hands over his face and hunched down in bed. Then the star spoke.

"Timothy Saxon! Look at me!"

Timothy looked between his fingers.

"I have come to help you," the star said gently.

"Who—what—who are you?" the sculptor croaked.

"Call me Kleon, of the Gold Star. Have you forgotten? It is I who suggested the statue to you."

Timothy suddenly sat stiffly against the head bars. "No! I dreamed that!" he argued.

"No more than you are dreaming this," said the star, and it shimmered indignantly, seeming to shake its radiations as a porcupine might shake its quills.

"But stars can't talk!" Timothy protested. "They can't come into rooms, either. It's got to be a dream."

"If you had tried to reach my mind for as many years as I have sought to reach yours," Kleon reproved, "you wouldn't say that so glibly. Every time you went to sleep watching the Gold Star, I was striving to contact you. And at last I have done it!"

More and more the fear grew on old Timothy that this was dread reality. "Why did you want to reach me?" he frowned.

"Because I have a message for Earth. A message that means life to a billion souls. Since I can't deliver it unaided I must give it through you." A pause; then: "I will make a bargain with you, Timothy Saxon. If you will help me with my mission, I will make you the greatest sculptor the world has ever known!"

Timothy's heart began to rap against his ribs. "Could—can you—do that?" he breathed.

"Of course," said Kleon. "But first—will you fulfill your half of the bargain?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Some time soon you must lend me your body," the star said simply. "I shall speak through you to the people of Earth. As it is, my mind has reached yours, but it cannot contact others. After I am finished, your body will be your own again."

It sounded weird and impossible to Timothy. But it seemed an easy way to achieve immortality. And somehow he didn't doubt that Kleon could do what he said.

"All right," he nodded. "I'll do it!"

The star was smiling again, expanding warmly. It drifted from the bed-post. "Where are your sketches?"

Timothy flung back the covers and stepped out on the cold floor. The room was so light he didn't think of turning on a bulb. Taking the sheaf of sketches from the bureau, he scattered them about on the table. He indicated the drawing on the table itself.

"I did that tonight!" he said eagerly. "That's closer to what I want than any of these."

Kleon was silent a while. Then: "No; that's not it at all. Look here—"

Timothy Saxon had the odd feeling that someone crowded his mind into a tiny corner at the back of his head. That another's brain was controlling his body. His fingers took up the pencil, turned over a used page, began to sketch with bold, sure strokes. The front view was quickly done. Then the right side, the back, the left side. . .

"You see?" Kleon breathed.

Timothy sank down in the chair from sheer wonder. "*Beautiful!*" he whispered. "The power of it—the spirit—"

Kleon cut in: "Have you wet clay?"

Timothy bounded across the room. He whipped wet burlap from the top of a big crock and dug out a double handful of moist brown clay. Once again, his mind seemed to be shouldered aside. His fingers began to work. As they had never worked!

That miniature built up from the bottom, as if it had been done all the time, and a curtain was merely being raised to expose it. The sculptor's fingers flew. Trimming with a scalpel. Buffing, gouging, scraping. In a moment it was done.

Timothy seemed to view it for the first time. He had to close his eyes, it was that wonderful. It was the work every sculptor dreams of, and never quite achieves. Then, like a thunderclap, recollection rocked him.

"But I can't do it!" he cried. "I haven't any tools!"

"No tools—?"

"They were stolen this morning! And Reams won't give me credit for a new set. He has some— They belonged to Michelangelo! With those I—I could do—anything!"

"Then you must have them. Now, do as I say. That half-finished bust of Judas, in the corner. Complete it. Use a broken kitchen knife for a chisel. Anything. Make it look as much like Reams as possible. Then show it to the vain fool. You'll get your tools!"

Timothy began to grin at the novel idea. "Say now," he chuckled. "Do you think he'd really fall for it?" His eyes measured the incomplete bust.

When he looked up, Kleon was gone. The room was dark except for the pallid spill of moonlight on the floor. Low over the black bulk of the gas-works, the Gold Star shone brightly.

Before he went to bed, Timothy Saxon finished up the

bust of Reams. It was a crude thing. . . a batch, really, but it might hit Reams' vanity just right.

Not for long did his mind puzzle over the miracle of Kleon and the Gold Star. Timothy was a simple man. The mechanics of Fate worried him less than its results. Like Doctor Faustus, he had unthinkingly promised his body to another, not wondering whether Kleon was a sort of angel, as he seemed, or. . . a devil from the skies.

But at least Kleon had not deceived him in regard to Reams. The art dealer was so startled at the flattering idea of anyone's making him a present of a bust—of himself, no less!—that he cut the price of the chisels to four hundred and let Timothy have them on credit. The sculptor hurried out of the shop before he could change his mind.

On the way home, an amazing thing happened.

Timothy Saxon was passing a crowded labor hall when he suddenly turned and walked inside. Sidewalk posters announced an anti-war meeting of the F. A. W.—Fellowship of American Workers. The place was packed with excited men listening to a speaker on the platform. The sculptor could not have told why he was there. He had no business with the F. A. W. But, he was, sitting in a corner listening intently.

"Listen to me, men!" a stout, gray-headed man on the platform was shouting. "For the third time in thirty-two years, England and France are on the eve of going to war. The Allies tell us that if we join them, we can wipe out the menace of dictatorship in six weeks. And so we could! But here's the catch—" He planted himself and pointed straight into the heart of the audience. "If civilization isn't destroyed this time, it will be a miracle. The horror of it is that Congress is on the point of throwing

the weight of our millions of members into the balance—stop the trend toward war! What do you say?”

The crowd rose to their feet, shouting hoarsely: “Yes!” Timothy knew that all over America this scene was being repeated. The question had been convulsing the public for a week.

After a while the shouting men sat down. It was then that Timothy Saxon rose to his feet and quietly said: “No!”

Every head in the hall swivelled. An angry murmur swept the laborers. The gray-headed man bellowed: “Throw him out! The damned war-monger—!”

Timothy’s raised hand stopped them dead. “This is an honorable war, and we must enter it.”

“Honorable war!” roared the speaker. “There is no such thing. This is mass suicide! The Fellowship of American Workers does not believe in war. Who are you, anyway, brother?”

Timothy’s smile was a gentle one. The light, coming through a small window, struck upon his silver hair so that it glowed with rich life. His face was illuminated; it was somehow like that of his own statue—“Peace.”

“I am Timothy Saxon, a poor sculptor,” he told them. “But I am one who loves peace. That is why I question your statements. You believe in right—in peace—don’t you?”

The leader stared at him with his head lowered. He was like an angry bull chained by his four feet. But he was just that—chained. Every man in the hall was hypnotized by something in Timothy’s face, in his soft words.

“Sure we do!” The speaker mumbled the words.

“And if rightness and peace can only be won by war, then you believe in war; don’t you?”

The audience stirred; glanced at the leader for an

answer. The stocky, gray man growled: "Yes, I suppose—no! I—I don't know what we believe!" His eyes flicked desperately over the crowd.

"Please!" Timothy raised his hand. "My friends, I don't mean to confuse you. I only want to point out what I can see so clearly. That the way to peace is through war. You see—"

The speaker beckoned him. "Maybe you better take the platform, brother. We might as well hear what you got to say."

"Thank you," Timothy smiled. And he passed among the silent workmen.

He spoke for a solid hour. Through that hour there dwelt with him the conviction that he was sitting somewhere listening. It was not he who spoke. It was Kleon of the Gold Star. Timothy Saxon was no speaker. Besides, Timothy believed in peace at almost any price. The only man in that hall who remained unconvinced was—Timothy Saxon. He was there, horrified at what he heard himself saying.

"That is why I urge it so strongly," he concluded. "I ask that this body adopt a resolution favoring America's immediate declaration of war! We want peace, but if peace be denied us, then let the cry be—war...war. . . war!"

The crowd took it up. "*War...war...war...war!*" They chanted the cry in unison. They were like so many mad dogs. They shook their fists and began to parade through the hall. In the midst of confusion, Timothy slipped out.

He reached home, a frightened and puzzled man. It disturbed him that Kleon could take possession of his body so easily. For he knew that was what had happened.

For the first time, his bargain with the star-man assumed a sinister mien. At length, the precious bundle in his arms aroused him.

In an instant, he was unwrapping the chisels. Politics were forgotten. Spreading the tools out on the table, he leaned over them. His eyes glittered, He picked one up, caressed it.

"The tools of the Master!" he whispered.

The very iron seemed to vibrate with the spirit of the dead sculptor. Reverently, Timothy placed the point against a corner of his marble block and struck it with the mallet. The chip came off clean and square. He tested it again, with perfect results. In a moment, his point was rattling swiftly over the surface.

Like a machine he labored; daylight dwindled. The stone chips about the floor were inches deep. What had been a square of uncut marble was now a rounded lump. At six o'clock, a knock came on the door.

There were a dozen men in the hall when he opened it. The stocky, gray-haired man was with them. He reached for Timothy's hand and pumped it warmly.

"I'm Howard Laird. Had the devil's own time finding you. Mr. Saxon, these men are reporters. They'd like an interview. And I'd like to talk to you about the F. A. W's. new war policy!"

Panic tugged at Timothy's coat-tails. "No!" he gulped. "What I said was hasty. I—I didn't mean a word of it, really. You see—"

"Come now, sir!" Laird winked at him. "This is no time for publicity stunts. Whether you know it or not, your speech went to a million radios. That was the East-of-the-Mississippi conclave you crashed! We were just mapping our ultimatum to Congress when you busted in." He moved to go past Timothy, and the sculptor extended

a thin arm to block him.

"I'm not well," he fumbled. "Appreciate your interest, but—tomorrow—please."

"But, Mr. Saxon—!"

Rudely, Timothy slammed and locked the door. He could hear perplexed mutterings. The reporters seemed bent on taking the interview by force. Laird's voice rose louder.

"Now, now, boys! Mr. Saxon did look tired. A speech like that takes the starch out of a man. You'll get your story tomorrow."

After their automobiles pulled out of the sordid street, Timothy slowly sank down upon his cot. In his mouth was the taste of ashes. What had he got into? What hellish bargain had he made? The virus of hatred with which he had infected the labor leaders was spreading like a plague.

Fatigue blunted his senses. Still gripping chisel and mallet, the sculptor fell asleep.

When the Gold Star rose above the window sill, Kleon came again. Timothy awoke with a start to see the glittering ball hanging above him. But this time there was a semblance form within the dazzling chrysalis. Timothy thought he could make out a face, as Kleon drifted across the room. At least there were two burning eyes, a gaping mouth.

"I see you got your tools," Kleon. "Your friend Reams was flattered?"

Timothy struggled out of bed and joined the star-man by the shaping statue. "Oh, yes! He even cut a hundred dollars off the price."

Hovering high, swooping low, the other-worldling inspected the statue. "The work goes well," he murmured.

Suddenly Timothy blurted out the thing that was trou-

bling him. "Funny thing happened to me today," he said. "After I got the tools, I got mixed up in some kind of a meeting. I said some of the gosh-awfullest things you ever heard! And—and the people swallowed it like fools!"

"Don't you know why?" Kleon asked. He took the old man across the room to a cracked mirror above the sink. "Look there!"

What Timothy saw was not his own, dull face, but the face of a man vastly finer, more spiritual. Yes, the features were the same, but the changes in them! His eyes burned with a holy luminosity. Strength had come to his slack jaw. The cast of his nose was heroic, delicately carved. From a brow lofty and intelligent, a silvery crop of hair swept back majestically.

"What they saw was a new Messiah preaching to them," Kleon explained. "The world is weary of pugnacious dictators. Men are sated with bull-voiced brow-beaters. They want to be led. What more natural than that an old man, full of wisdom and years, should lead them? An old man—with the vigor of a young man's mind lighting up his face?"

"But I don't want to lead!" Timothy shook his head violently. "I don't believe those things you made me say. I despise war. I—I won't do it!"

"No thinking man despises war," was Kleon's crisp response. "In your own word, 'If war is necessary to bring about rightness and peace—then give me war!'"

"Your words, you mean! If you hadn't hypnotized them, they wouldn't have swallowed that guff! I tell you I won't do it! I didn't know what you were going to ask of me—"

"But you promised, none the less! And you're going to keep that promise."

Timothy hissed, fists screwing hard: "I'll go to hell and back before I'll do it! Send millions of young men to their deaths so I can carve a good statue? You can't make me!"

"Can't I, Timothy Saxon? Perhaps you have things to hear. You'll never finish your 'Peace' without my help. I'll be back from time to time. And I think you'll welcome me! As one day you will welcome my people!"

"I'll welcome you with a mallet over the head!" Timothy screeched. Wildly he swung the little sledge. Instantly the room fell dark.

He was alone again. Someone in the flat below was pounding on the floor with a broomstick. The terrified old man stumbled off to bed.

Reassurance came with the morning. There was solidness in the clanking of locomotives up the river. The fishy odors of the hawkers' markets was clean and sweet in his nostrils. Timothy took up his tools and drew a deep breath.

Kleon would be back, would he? Let him come! Meanwhile, Timothy Saxon, sculptor, would go on with his work of immortality!

With biting chisel, Timothy wore that day into darkness. Gaunt old scarecrow that he was, he prowled about his statue with critical eye. Now he would pounce upon it and hammer like a fiend. The grit would fly until he was all but enveloped in a cloud of flying white chips. Then again he hung over the plaster model, studying. Once more he would attack the stone as if in a fit.

There were hours when his chisel danced over the block without pausing. They told it that Michelangelo worked

in that harum-scarum fashion. Timothy wasn't affecting the style of the maestro. With the great one's own tools, how could he work otherwise?

When night came, his old eyes were all but blind. He slopped down a can of soup and some coffee and went to bed. And dreamed. . .

He spoke to thousands of cheering men at a meeting in a great stadium. On a lighted podium, he was an almost Biblical figure with his long hair, his flashing eyes. Hysterical admirers bore him out of the arena on their shoulders. For an instant he saw Kleon's blurry face. He was laughing at him.

When Timothy went down for a paper next morning, eager neighbors swarmed about him. Men who had sneered at him for a slovenly old hack artist a week ago now wanted to shake his hand. Women held up babies for his kiss. Urchins yelled at him: "Hi, Mister Saxon! You sure told 'em last night, didn't you?"

Muttering vague answers, Timothy got his paper and fled.

NEW LABOR MESSIAH DEMANDS WAR!

SPEAKS AT NATIONAL F. A. W RALLY!

"America Must Save World From Itself," says Saxon;

To Confer With Labor, G. O. P., Democratic

Heads Tonight.

This was the thing he read when he was closeted in his own room. It staggered him. Kleon had stolen his body last night. *Stolen it!* If he could do it once, he could do it again and again.

Timothy came to a bitter conclusion. The one way he could save the country from war, was to go where Kleon could not find him. . . if such a place existed. But he could not tear himself from his work, leaving it half-finished, perhaps to be stolen by souvenir-hunters. Now,

while genius lay in his fingers, he must finish.

He chopped away at the tough marble until late afternoon. He saw the Messiah—the *real* Messiah!—begin to emerge from the stone. He gave him crude arms and legs and hands. Tomorrow he would start putting life into those limbs: muscles, perfectly flexed; tendons rippling the skin; lines in the palms of the hands.

Before dark, he sneaked out and got three lug-boxes of canned food, on credit. “Credit cheerfully given,” now. Returning to his flat, he locked the door and threw the key into the street. No somnabulistic speeches for Timothy Saxon tonight!

That was how Timothy learned a mere key was no match for Kleon, of the Gold Star. For daylight showed the lock neatly chopped away with the chisels of the master.

Timothy Saxon’s veins carried blood like stagnant water. He was whipped, ready to run. But he was shackled to this dingy flat by his love of art, his hunger to create a masterpiece..

In the four days that followed, he sipped nectar on Olympus and gnawed brimstone in hell. Work on the statue went incredibly well. He couldn’t carve a wrong line. He was chiselling mud from an already completed work of art. Merely exposing the beauty beneath. Staring up at it, the work raised high on a flimsy scaffolding to make the make the labor on the legs easier, he could understand how Michelangelo had struck his “Moses” and cried, “Speak!” Timothy could imagine a pulse throbbing in the figure’s throat. He could see the eyes blink, the fingers tremble.

There was nothing left now but to smooth a few rough spots.

As he lay, aching tired, on his bed that night, the

week's headline's fled across his brain like ticker tape: "Saxon Speaks to 100 Million on Coastwise Hookup!" "G. O. P. Falls in Line With 'War Messiah;'" "War or Doom, Democratic Slogan." "Congress Readies Hugh Draft Bill; Twenty Million to be Under Arms!"

And that very evening's paper: "Saxon To Confer With President. War Seen as Outcome of Confab. U. S. Decision to Affect Entire Globe!"

There was a modicum of comfort in that. If the conference was to be a daytime affair, he could fight off Kleon! Refuse to meet the president. And perhaps sanity would come back.

Timothy went to sleep with that prayer. He awoke feeling miraculously refreshed. By that, he knew he had done no sleep-walking. Scorning breakfast, he plunged into his work again. Finish the job... move it to the Fine Arts Building... flee! This was his plan.

By mid-afternoon the statue was finished. Timothy dropped his buffer. He collapsed into the chair and his red-rimmed eyes swept over the piece. Queer, croaking noises emanated from his throat. But speak, he could not.

The tears poured down his face. When a man hungers for beauty all his life, he is not apt to find words of thanks after he finishes the most sublime work of art the world has ever seen. And Timothy Saxon knew he had done just that.

"Peace" was a prayer in marble. Men would interpret its divine appeal differently, but all would be profoundly moved. They would look at the Master's eyes, brimming with tears, and tears would come to their own. The lines of the face told the story of Timothy's own despairs, his fears, loves, hates; not a man could see the Messiah's grief-wracked countenance without remembering half-forgotten sorrows of his own.

The lustre Timothy had given the marble was that of burnished gold. It glowed so that every cranny in the squallid room seemed brilliantly lighted.

The old man started from his chair, as voices resounded in the hall. Someone banged on the door.

"Mr. Saxon! It's three o'clock, sir! The President's been waiting at the hotel for an hour. Are you coming?"

"No!" Timothy cried, whirling to face the door. Then, as if by ventriloquism, he heard his voice saying calmly:

"Yes, of course, gentlemen. I'll be right with you."

Slowly Timothy turned back. Kleon was in the room. He knew that. Over by the window he saw him; saw *It*, rather.

Nothing golden or star-like remained about the creature. He possessed a certain solidity, the gelatinous substance of a jelly-fish. Timothy was reminded of a giant slug, two or three feet high, with a brown, shiny face. That ugly grinning mouth parted.

"Did you say you weren't going to keep your promise?" Kleon taunted. "My friend, you were wrong. In one minute you will go to the door and leave this room. You will never come back. For you, there is a glorious future leading the armies of America. The poor sculptor who rose to dictatorship! Later, perhaps, we will challenge all Europe—all the world!"

"No!" Timothy's hands clawed at the table behind him. "I—I won't!"

Kleon wriggled across the room toward him, lying flat on his moist belly to advance. His green, hard eyes held Timothy's.

"Would you like to know why I need you? Would you like to see the future rulers of Earth—after Earthmen

weaken themselves by the most beautiful war in history? Look at me—”

Timothy's rebellious eyes were captured by Kleon's. From the green depths, weirdness bubbled up. He saw a world almost devoid of vegetation. In blighted fields of purple bushes, he saw Kleon's fellow-beings. Timothy thought of maggots, crawling in festering carcasses. Of stinking white worms, greedily gorging themselves on the fruit of a whole planet. In the distance were mud burrows, like giant worm-dugs.

Kleon was talking. “These are my people. Do you know the planet Garth, of the Gold Star? Well, you wouldn't, I suppose; it's forty million light years away. Garth is too small for us. We have such good appetites that it has become necessary to plant crops, lately. By the time we have eaten our way around the world, the new, wild crops haven't had time to grow. So the Gold Men have become unwilling agriculturists. Here on Earth it will be different. Here, there are so many millions of miles of growing stuff that we will always have enough to eat.”

“You can't do it!” Timothy cried. “You can't get here, even if you could overcome Earth.”

“Don't be too sure, my misguided friend. Earthmen do not comprehend the tremendous power of thought. As I have seized your body for hours at a time, so I soon do for good. Later, my entire race will borrow bodies. When the carnage is over and Earth a smoking ruin, we can resurrect our own bodies from the stuff of yours.”

Outside, someone was rapping on the door. “Is anything wrong, Mr. Saxon?” Howard Laird demanded, anxiously.

Timothy hunched toward Kleon, hissing: “You said

I couldn't finish my statue. But I did! Michelangelo is more powerful dead than you are alive!"

"Michelangelo!" Kleon dwelt sneeringly on the name. "He never touched those tools. Cheap, pig-iron scraps fashioned to cheat fools like you. Michelangelo! Moses! Bah! All I gave you to work with was confidence. Somehow you held onto that. Come, friend Saxon; we are going to meet them now!"

Timothy's mind was caught in a mad whirlpool. He lashed out blindly with his fists. But that clammy force was wrenching at his brain. He was being dragged toward the door. "Let me go!" he screeched. "Let me—"

"Softly, softly," breathed Kleon. "You must go to your destiny— Dictator of Earth!"

Shoulders were lunging against the door. Laird was yelling: "Mr. Saxon! Mr. Saxon! Let us in!" But the sculptor had piled a dozen marble busts against the portal to keep out reporters after the lock was broken, and it held staunchly.

Timothy bumped against the statue, grabbed at it and went to his knees. It was as if strong hands were tearing at him. His strength was going. His will to fight dissipated like smoke. Dictator of Earth! Wars! Glory! Why not?

For one last instant the fog ripped, and he saw clearly. How could he comprehend—poor, slow-witted old hack—that his two hands held the salvation of Earth? But know it he did. Knew, too, that if the power existed to defeat Kleon, it was not a human force. In that moment of despair, Timothy's eyes went to the face of his Messiah.

And suddenly peace came to him, for he read his answer in the glowing eyes. It was so clear, so simple. Kill himself and he had defeated Kleon! Kleon must return

to the Gold Star, and perhaps he would never again trap another as he had trapped Timothy Saxon.

Timothy stood up and put his arms about the kneeling stone figure. He pulled mightily. The din in the hall was terrific. Someone was bellowing: "Police! He's being murdered!"

Kleon was screeching too. But old Timothy kept tugging at the statue until he had pulled it off balance. As it went plowing toward the floor, he threw his arms about his neck and clung there.

The ponderous marble figure landed with a shock that rocked the entire floor. The planks splintered and barely held it from crashing straight through. Like a bit of dried mud that is dropped on the sidewalk, it cracked and fell apart. And Timothy—Not a bone of his body was left unbroken. A cracked rib punctured his heart. But he was still smiling when the men broke into the room. . .

* * * * *

From the *New York Plain Dealer*:

"Timothy Saxon, the unknown sculptor who rose from obscurity to fame in the space of a week, died this afternoon.

Circumstances surrounding his death were mysterious. Saxon's body was found beneath the crumbled remains of a fallen statue. Evidence pointed to violence, but investigating officers could detect no strange footprints in the thick dust on the floor.

Howard Laird, head of the F. A. W., announces that an exhaustive study will be made of Saxon's policy before his organization backs it any further. 'In the hands of one not completely familiar with Saxon's plans, the "War or Doom" philosophy might be fatal,' Laird told reporters.

A paradoxical touch was furnished by the fact that

Saxon, the 'War Messiah', was working on a statue of Peace at the time of his death, according to Fred Reams, an art dealer whom the artist died owing for a recently-purchased set of tools. Little remained of the work. But George Seville, well-known in the world of art, states that the right hand, the only undamaged part of Saxon's 'Peace', is one of the finest bits of sculpture he has ever examined. Seville has entered this fragment in Timothy Saxon's memory in the Fine Arts Exposition next month. . . "

* * * * *

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SONGS of the SPACEWAYS

POETRY EDITOR: LILLITH LORRAINE, ROGERS, ARK.

CYBERNETIC

Have you seen Earth lately?

Well, don't bother. Everybody is
dead.

The correct term is
Survival
of the Fittest.

Man was a very interesting specimen,
pink and grasping,
but in Harvard and Vienna and Tokyo
only the brain machines watch
while white petals fall in warm rain.

The great hulks of steel,
shadows of purple in empty purple halls,
still mesh their gears with
precision.

For after all, the men in the laboratories
should have known what they were creating.
A human being made mistakes and never took
the trouble to correct them. Machines
work problems properly.

So don't bother seeing Earth. The machines
are still there, and the white petals
fall in warm rain, but there aren't even
any more problems.

J. W. Jakes

JOURNEY TO BARKUT

BY MURRAY LEINSTER

PART ONE

I.

THIS is the story of what happened to Tony Gregg after he had learned about the fourth dimension—or maybe it was the fifth or sixth—in a *shishkebab* restaurant in the Syrian quarter on lower East Broadway, New York. That's not all he learned, of course, but the more exotic things he learned turned up later, and they were all of them unexpected. He didn't even go to the restaurant to learn about the fourth dimension in the first place. His visit was simply for *shishkebab*, which is a dish of lamb cubes skewered on small round sticks and cooked in an unlikely sauce containing grape-leaves. It was accidental that he asked the owner of the restaurant about a coin that he—Tony—carried as a luck-piece. It was gold, and possibly valuable, but no numismatist would admit that it came from any known nation or age or clime.

Tony'd bought it for a lucky charm in one of those tiny shops on side-streets in New York, where antique jewelry and ivory chessmen and things like that are on display in the windows. He picked it out because it looked odd. His conscience—Tony had been raised with a very articulate conscience—reluctantly consented to the purchase because the coin was very heavy for its size and might be gold. It certainly wasn't a medal and therefore had to be a coin. It had an inscription in conventionalized Arabic script on one side, and something on the other that looked like an elaborate throne without anybody sitting on it.

But when Tony tried to look it up there simply wasn't any record in any numismatic catalog of any coinage even resembling it.

One night—this was his first visit, not the time he learned about the fourth dimension—he went down on East Broadway for *shishkebab*, and it occurred to him to ask the Syrian restaurant-keeper what the Arabic inscription might say. The Syrian read it, and told Tony that the inscription was that of a ten-dirhim piece, and it said it was a coin of Barkut. But he had never heard of any place called Barkut, and neither had Tony. So Tony got a little curious about it, and actually spent an hour in the public library, a few days later, trying to find out something about either the coin or the country it came from. But there was nothing to be found out. The coin was solid gold, though. A jeweler verified that. As bullion, it was worth somewhere around six dollars. And since Tony had paid only a dollar and a half for it, he was rather pleased. His conscience, even, smugly approved. It isn't often that you pick up anything in an antique shop that you can sell for more than you paid for it, no matter what people tell you. So Tony kept it for a luck-piece, and every night on the way home from the office he paused outside Paddy Scanlon's Bar and Grill and gravely tossed the coin to see whether he should have a drink or not. Which was a pretty good way of being neither too abstemious or too regular in such matters. His conscience consented to this, too.

He didn't really think the coin brought him luck, but the small mystery of it intrigued him. He was a rather commonplace young man, was Tony. He'd been in the war, but he never got beyond a base camp. He sat in uniform and pounded a typewriter for three long years. Then he got out and got his old job back—at the same

salary—and went back to his old lodging-house at a higher rate per week. He was glad he had the coin, because he liked to imagine things. His conscience sternly and constantly reminded him that he should be polite, attentive to his duties, efficient and no clock-watcher, and the radio reminded him every morning while he was dressing to use a specific tooth-paste, hair tonic, breath deoderant, and brand of popular-priced suits. It was pleasant to have something vague and mysterious around. The coin could not have been made as a novelty or anything like that, and it came from no country in the world. He liked to think that there was some mystery about its having reached his hands; some significance in the fact that he had come to own it and no one else. To make it seem more significant, probably, he got into the habit of tossing it for all decisions of no particular moment. Whether to go to a ball-game or not. Whether or not to eat at his regular restaurant. His conscience dourly reserved decision.

He'd owned the coin two months, and the habit of using it to make small decisions had become fixed, when one evening he tossed it to see whether or not he should go to his regular restaurant for dinner. It came tails. No. He was mildly amused. To another restaurant uptown? Tails again. He flipped and flipped. His common sense told him that he was simply running into a long sequence of tails. But he liked to think that the decisions of the coin were mysterious and significant. Tonight he almost became excited when one place after another was negatived. He ran out of restaurants he could remember having dined in. So he tossed the coin with the mental note that if it came heads he'd find a new restaurant, where he'd never dined before. But the coin came tails. Negative. Then he racked his brains, and remembered the little Syr-

ian restaurant down on lower East Broadway. He flipped for that. The coin came heads.

He got on the subway and rode downtown, while his conscious made scornful comments about superstition. He went into the small converted store with something like an anticipatory thrill. His way of life was just about as unexciting as anybody's life could be. He had been pretty well tamed by the way he was raised, which had created a conscience with a mind of its own and usually discouraging opinions. His conscience now spoke acidly, and he had to assure it that he didn't really believe that the coin meant anything, but he liked to pretend to believe it.

So he sat down at a table and automatically flipped the coin to see whether he should order *shishkebab* or not. The swarthy, slick-haired proprietor grinned at him. There was a bald-headed man at a table in the back—a man in impeccably tailored clothing, with gold-rimmed eyeglasses and the definite dark dignity of a Levantine.

"Say," said the proprietor, in wholly colloquial English. "You showed me a funny goldpiece last time you were here. You still got it? Mr. Emurian, back there, he knows a lot about that stuff. A very educated man! You want I should ask him about it?"

This seemed to Tony a mysterious coincidence. He agreed eagerly. The restaurant-keeper took the coin. He showed it to the bald-headed man. They talked at length. The restaurant-keeper came back.

"He never seen one like it," he reported. "And he never heard of Barkut, where it says it came from. But he says there's a kinda story about coins and things like that, that come from places that nobody ever heard of. He'll tell you if you want."

"Please!" said Tony. He found his heart beating faster. "If he'll join me——."

"Oh, he'll have a cuppa coffee, maybe," said the restaurant-keeper. "On the house. He's a very educated man, Mr. Emurian is."

He went back. The bald-headed man rose and came with easy dignity to Tony's table. His eyes twinkled. Tony was flustered because this Mr. Emurian looked so foreign and spoke such perfect English and was so perfectly at ease.

"There is a legend," he told Tony humorously, "which might amuse you. It's an old wives' tale, and yet it fits oddly into the theories of Mr. Einstein and other learned men. But I know a man in Ispahan who would give you a great sum for that coin because of the legend. Would you wish to sell?"

Tony shook his head.

"Say — five hundred dollars?" asked Mr. Emurian, smiling behind his eyeglasses. "No? Not even a thousand? —I will give you the address of the man who will buy it, if you ever wish to sell."

He laughed.

"This man," he explained amiably, "would say that the coin comes from a country which is not upon our maps because it is unapproachable by any ordinary means. Yet it is wholly real and actually has a certain commerce with us. It is—hm—have you ever heard of worlds supposed to be like ours in other—ah, dimensions, say, or in parallel but not identical times?"

"I've read Wells's *Time Machine*," said Tony awkwardly.

"Not at all the same," the dark man assured him. "And notions of machines for traveling between sets of dimensions or in time itself are quite absurd. Discoveries of that sort are never drastic! When electricity was discovered, it was your Franklin who observed that it was no

new force, but quite commonplace. Every thunderstorm since time began had demonstrated it. Similarly, if travel between worlds or to other times should ever become really practical, it is certain that the discovery will not be dramatic. It will turn out that people have been doing it for centuries as a matter of course, without ever realizing it."

"You mean—" Tony stopped.

"The legend," said Mr. Emurian, beaming, "suggests that your coin came from a world not our own. That it came from a world where history quite truthfully denies much of the history we truthfully teach to children." He regarded Tony zestfully and said: "Ordinarily, two things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. But two places which are exactly equal to each other—are the same place! Now consider! Suppose that somewhere there existed a world in which Aladdin's lamp was real and in good working order. Suppose that upon it there was a place which was absolutely indetical with a place in this world. It would have to be a place where the working or not working of Aladdin's lamp made absolutely no difference. Now, according to the legend, those two places, on two worlds, would actually be one place which was on both worlds, and which would serve as a perfectly practical gateway between them. Travelers would pass casually through it without ever noticing it. You and I, perhaps, pass through such gateways every day without the least realization."

The dark man seemed to find amused satisfaction in the look of mystified enthusiasm on Tony's face. He waved a manicured hand.

"Look at this restaurant. Here. Tonight," he said, beaming. "Today, for example, Calcutta could have vanished in a tidal wave and be sunk forever under the sea.

Or it could not. Here and now, we knowing nothing about it, such an event would still have made no slightest difference. So that from this restaurant tonight we could walk out into two different worlds—you into the one where such an event had taken place, and I into the world where it did not. And I might go and live peacefully and die of old age in the Calcutta which to you was utterly destroyed.”

“But we are in the same world!” protested Tony. “We’ll stay in the same world!”

“Probably, but are you sure?” Mr. Emurian twinkled through his glasses. “We have never seen each other before. How do you know that I have always lived in this particular world? How do you know that the history of the world in which I was born is the same? —I was surely not taught from the same history books!— And if we separate here tonight and you never see or hear of me again, how will you know that I remain in the world you inhabit?”

Tony said painfully, but with his heart beating fast: “I guess I won’t. But there’s no proof, either, that——”

“We agree,” said Mr Emurian, nodding. “There can be no proof. I have told you a legend. It says there are other worlds. They are not quite real to us, because we cannot reach them at will. But according to legend they touch each other at many places, and it is possible to travel from one to another, and in fact we constantly visit the frontier-cities of other worlds without ever knowing it. And we do not know it because we are a part of our own world, and there is an attraction; a magnetism; a gravitation perhaps, which by ordinary means draws us back before we stray far from the gateway of a world which is not our own.”

He regarded Tony benevolently through his eyeglasses.

“As for your coin: sometimes that gravitation or attraction is not enough. We stray deep into other worlds and doubtless we are very unhappy. Or an object from another world strays into ours. But always the gravitation or the magnetism remains to some degree. —That is what my friend in Ispahan believes, so that he might be willing to pay you as much as two thousand dollars for the coin in your hand.”

Tony looked at the coin with deep respect. He had never in all his life owned anything worth even a fraction of two thousand dollars. His conscience spoke firmly. He said wistfully: “I—suppose I ought to sell it, then. I can’t really afford to carry around a luck-piece as valuable as that. I—might lose it.” Then he added unhappily: “I suppose your friend is a coin-collector?”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Emurian. “He is a business man. He would use the coin, I am sure, to get into this other world and set up a branch of his business there. He would import Barkutian dates or dried figs or rugs, or possibly gold and frankencense and myrrh. He might deal in ivory and apes and peacocks in exchange for Birmingham cutlery, printed cotten cloth, and kerosine lamps. And if the atmosphere were congenial he might establish a residence there, staffed with pretty slave-girls and Mameluk guards, and settle down to a life of luxury.

Tony said more wistfully still: “How’d the coin guide him to Barkut?”

Mr. Emurian shook an admonitory finger.

“You accept my legend as fact, my dear sir! You are a romantic!” Then he added comfortably: “I do not know that he would consider that it was not quite real in this world, and hence should be exempt from some physical laws. He would expect it to have some tendency to become more real, which it could only do by returning to

its own time and place. How the tendency would show itself, I cannot guess. But I will write down my friend's name and address. I promise that he will pay you a high price for your token."

Tony Gregg looked almost hungrily at the coin. An idea came into his head. His conscience protested indignantly.

"I'll toss it," he said unhappily. "Heads I sell it, tails I don't."

He tossed. The coin came tails. He gulped in relief and pushed back his chair.

"It's settled," he said, with smiling eyes. He flushed a little in his excitement. "And—and I won't take your friend's address because I—don't want to be able to change my mind."

Mr. Emurian beamed.

"A romantic!" he said approvingly. "It is admirable! I wish you good fortune, sir!"

Tony thanked him confusedly, paid his bill and departed.

Outside, in the spottily lighted street, he felt more or less dazed, though his conscience was bitingly reproachful and demanded specifically that he go back and get the address he had just refused. This was in the Syrian quarter, on lower East Broadway, with signs in Arabic in those scattered shop windows which were still lighted. Most of the buildings about were dark and silent, and there were only occasional lumbering trucks for traffic. The atmosphere was a compound of the exotic and commonplace which did not make for clear thinking. The facts were dazzling, too. If the coin in Tony's pocket was worth two thousand dollars, that in itself was enough to make him dizzy. He had never carried more than a week's

salary in his pocket at any time, and never that much for long.

So he rode uptown on a subway train which had come from Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, and would go uptown only to Times Square. At Times Square he changed trains like a sleep-walker and went further uptown still. But he was lost in excited, dizzy speculation which hardly let him notice his surroundings. He had come up from the subway exit and was walking toward his lodging when he realized he'd been too agitated to eat the *shish-kebab* he'd paid for. He came to a diner, and was still hungry. He automatically flipped the coin. It came heads, and he entered the diner. The man at the stool next to him got up and went out. He'd had a paper that he'd stuck under him when he finished with it. Tony thriftily retrieved it while waiting for his hamburger and coffee. Then a thrill went all the way down his backbone and he nearly choked at the same time. The paper was *Racing Form*.

On the way uptown Tony'd had a bitter argument with his infuriated conscience. He'd insisted defensively that if an importer of dates and dried figs and rugs in Ispahan could find profit in a journey to Barkut, why couldn't an up and coming young American do even better? Tony was no business man, but he'd been trained to believe that anybody who did not desire above all things to be a brisk young executive had something wrong with him. So he'd been insisting feverishly that commerce in electric refrigerators, nylon stockings, fertilizer, lipstick and bubble gum was his life's ambition, and this was his chance! But actually, his mind had kept slipping off sideways to visions of white-walled cities under a blazing sun, and of lustrous-eyed slave-girls and *Mameluks* armed with scimitars, and of camel-caravens winding over desert wastes.

It was in a hopeless confusion of such images that he left the diner and went to his room, clutching *Racing Form* fast. He sat up till long past midnight, flipping the coin and charting out a crucial test of its virtues. He dreamed chaotically all night, and when morning came he awoke with common-sense—his conscience—reviling him bitterly for his plans.

But he would not be shamed out of them. His conscience grew strident and then almost hysterical. He sneaked out of the house with a hang-dog air as if to avoid his own eyes, and he rode to Belmont with his hat pulled down over his forehead. When he put down the first two dollars at the betting window his conscience had been reduced to the point of simply jeering at him for a fool and a romantic, refusing a chance to sell a crazy luck-piece for two thousand dollars so he could use it to guide him in making two-dollar bets! A horse named Rainy Sunday? his conscience jeered derisively. Tomorrow would be Black Friday when he was fired for taking an unauthorized day off!

But Rainy Sunday won, paying six for two. Then Occiput paid off. Then, in order, Slipstream, Miss Inflation, Quiz Kid and Armageddon... And the daily double...

Tony rode back to town in a sort of stunned composure. He had a trifle—a few hundred—more than eleven thousand dollars in his pocket. His conscience told him with icy disapproval that it had all been coincidence, and that now the proper thing for him to do was put that eleven thousand dollars in good, conservative securities, and never go near a race-track again.

So Tony went to his room and packed in feverish haste while his conscience yammered at him in mounting agitation, paid his rooming-house bill and went out and flag-

ged a taxi while the mood of resolution—and escape—was upon him. In the taxi he flipped the coin to see where he should head in order to take the coin nearer to Barkut. If there was a mysterious attraction trying to pull the coin back to its own world, it would obviously work on probabilities, operating to cause coincidences that would take it home. And if somebody was letting it guide him by flipping it for heads and tails . . .

There was eleven thousand dollars to make the theory seem likely, and a couple of weeks later Tony considered the theory proved.

He had reached, he was fairly sure, a place well off any imaginable map of the world he had been born in. He stood on a sandy beach with blue sea to his left and desert on all other sides. A middle-sized whirlwind, or sand-devil, spun meditatively in one place a quarter-mile away, seeming to watch. And Tony had one desert Arab, very much unwashed, squirming under his right foot and two other equally unwashed scoundrels coming furiously at him with spears from right and left. At this moment he thought irrelevantly but not at all regretfully of the tossings of the coin that had begun his journey.

He did not have time for philosophizing, however. So he swung the long, curved scimitar in his right hand, pulled his belted-in-the-back topcoat out of the way with his left hand, and attended to his would-be assassins.

This, however, was two weeks later. Meanwhile . . .

IT COULD have been a very happy journey, but Tony's conscience spoiled everything. It spoke with an inflection very much like the maiden aunt who had raised him. Tony would get into trouble, said his conscience gloomily, for

slipping off without a passport, and actually bribing somebody to help him do it. He should have paid the income-tax on that eleven thousand dollars and put the rest in gilt-edged bonds. He should *not* have flown across the South Atlantic in a plane of such antiquity to a flying-field in Tunisia instead of to a proper airport where he would have been arrested for not having proper papers. He should *not* have slugged the Tunisian customs-official who was planning to arrest him anyhow, even though the coin had blithely come heads when tossed for the decision. And certainly, having done so, he should not have tucked a hundred-dollar bill in officialdom's fingers for the man to find when he came to. To be sure, the official had pocketed the bill and kept his mouth shut, but fifty would have been enough. After all, where was more money coming from when this was gone, and what was Tony gaining in exchange for wasted cash?

So said Tony's conscience, which was a killjoy. He ignored it as much as he could. It was exhilarating to dodge regulations and red tape after a lifetime subject to them. His conscience said aggrievedly that he was now a felon and would presently be confined in a jail with primitive sanitary arrangements. Tony's maiden aunt, who had formed his conscience, had been strong on sanitation.

But Tony paid no heed. He spent money lavishly and got in return things which he prized highly. A sight of the sun setting on the desert. Once a bare glimpse of a dusky Arab damsel's face when the wind blew aside her veil. The smell of horses and camels and the East generally—concentrated it was bad, but when sufficiently diluted it was delectable—and that exciting moment near the end of his journeying when a thief tried to rob him in the bazaar at Suakim on the Red Sea and Tony grandly

rescued him from the blows of indignant merchants who had meant to rob Tony in another manner. Afterward, too, he hired the thief to be his guide and interpreter. The coin came heads when he tossed it for the decision.

These things gave him satisfactions not to be obtained from the actions approved by commonsense and the code of conduct a right-thinking young future executive should abide by. Tony thrived on them. He put on weight. He grew sunburned. Contentedly going where the toss of a coin suggested, knowing nothing of what the next instant would bring except that it would be unexpected, he straightened up from what had been an incipient book-keeper's stoop. He walked with a freer motion and looked—this was the odd part—a much more likely prospect for a young executive's job than he had ever looked before.

His conscience grudgingly conceded as much, but waxed ever more bitter as Tony spent his funds lavishly for progress toward whatever unknown destination the supposedly homing coin would lead him to. Curiously, the coin did come an almost mathematically exact number of heads and tails over a reasonable period of time. The laws of chance were not broken by an excess of heads, or tails, or excessively long runs of either. There could be absolutely no evidence that Tony's travels were guided by anything but purest arbitrary chance. But his journeying was convincingly direct, when he plotted it on a map. He'd come as straight as transportation facilities would allow to Suakim on the Red Sea.

Suakim is, and always will be, a hot and sleepy and odorous town full of Arabs, Tamils, Somalis, and other persons who regard non-Moslems—their official rulers included—as the destined and legitimate prey of the Faithful. Tony's newly-hired interpreter considered Tony his express and particular quarry. For a time he tried vali-

antly to collect by persuading Tony to make purchases on which he would collect commissions of from fifty to seventy-five per cent. For one long night he waited hopefully for Tony to snore, so that he could rob his baggage. But Tony slept dreamlessly and silently, like a child. Then his opportunity came.

On the third day of Tony's stay in Suakim—the coin had come tails at any suggestion of departure—the interpreter's chance had come. Tony made some small purchase in the bazaar. He gave an Egyptian pound in payment. In the change there was a small silver coin with an inscription in conventionalized Arabic script on one side, and an ornate, empty throne on the other. Tony regarded it with apparent calm. He showed it to his hired thief.

"This is a coin of Barkut," he told the man who had tried to rob him. "It is my desire to go to Barkut. Arrange it."

He went back to the fly-infested hotel where he paid nine prices for his lodging. He spent some time flipping the coin. He had changed a good deal inside as well as out, once he had learned how to grow really stern with his conscience. The coin turned up some heads and some tails. If it actually had a homing instinct, it gave him essential information. If everything had been a matter of chance up to now, and the series of coincidences between fact and the heads-and-tails decisions of the coin were about to end, it simply led him to preparations for an over-elaborate suicide.

Within the hour, his interpreter came back to the hotel with voluble assurance that he had engaged a *bakhil* to carry Tony to Barkut. It was taking on the last of its cargo now. It would put out into the harbor at sunset, and Tony must board it secretly during the night because of harbor regulations.

Tony packed. He was reasonably well outfitted, now. He dressed for his journey in the absolute ultimate of the inappropriate. He wore a soft felt hat, brightly-polished brown shoes, and a camel's-hair topcoat with a belt in the back. He slipped a revolver in his pocket.

Night fell. Tony dined, as well as the resources of Suakim would permit. He felt expansive and contented. Two hours after dark, his interpreter returned with news that the *Bakhil* was out in the harbor and awaited his coming. Tony went down to the water-front of Suakim—a not too cautious move in itself, alone and at night. He climbed down a ladder into a small boat and placidly let himself be rowed out in the darkness. The night was black, save that stars glowed enormously against a sky like velvet. The sleepy, murmurous sounds of the city were very romantic indeed. There was the plashing of waves, and somewhere a wraith of string music where revelers made merry, and somewhere a dog barked indignantly in the darkness. That was all, except the sound of the oars.

Presently a dark form loomed ahead. The *bakhil*, an ungainly shape some seventy or eighty feet long, with the stubby thick mast and colossal boom of her lateen rig. Tony's interpreter hailed. A guttural voice replied. The small boat came alongside the *bakhil* and the interpreter steadied it for Tony to step on board. He climbed to the deck. The *bakhil* stank glamorously of fish and pearl-oysters and goat-hides and kerosine and tar and bilgewater and humanity. Its deck was an impenetrable maze of shadows in the starlight. Tony drew a deep breath of complete satisfaction. He moved aside to be out of the way.

Then there was an infuriated howl and the sound of oars being worked at panic-stricken speed. Tony's inter-

preter and guide had obsequiously held the small boat to allow him to board the *bakhil*. The unwashed cutthroats of its crew prepared to receive Tony's baggage. Instead, they saw and heard the shore-boat being rowed away at the topmost speed of which the interpreter was capable.

The *bakhil*'s crew howled with rage, which was not righteous indignation at the witnessing of a theft, but the much greater rage of being cheated of the privilege of stealing Tony's possessions for themselves. Men raved up and down the deck, uttering deep-throated maledictions at the top of their voices. Then, foreward, the loudest voice shouted down the others. A small boat from the *bakhil* splashed overside. It went cursing after the racing oar-strokes of the boat with Tony's baggage in it.

Tony stepped delicately to the stern and ensconced himself against the rail. He got out a cigarette-lighter and lighted a cigarette and puffed it in complete satisfaction. This event had been implied in the series of heads and tails the golden coin of Barkut had turned up when he spun it for decisions on how he should prepare for the trip by sea. All this uproar was consoling confirmation of the homing tendency of the ten-dirhim piece. He smoked beatifically, while out on the dark harbor water one small boat manned by cutthroats went raging after another small boat manned by a sneak-thief, and the crew of the *bakhil* listened between cursings to the sounds on the water.

Far off, there was a howl of fury. Still farther, a triumphant yell of derision. The small boat of the *bakhil* came back in a thick fog of sulphurous language. Evidently, Tony's late interpreter had made the shore and gotten away with his loot. The disappointed mariners returned in an ugly mood.

The boat's crew returned to the deck. The boat itself

was made fast overside. There was much muttered talk. Then men came astern to where Tony smoked in blissful excitement. They surged toward him deliberately. He snapped his cigarette-lighter. Its glow showed him the villianous bearded faces of the *bakhil's* crew. Hairy chests and ragged garments. Knives ready.

But the lighter's flame showed them Tony, puffing joyously on his cigarette, with one hand holding the lighter and the other a revolver ready for action.

There was a pause without words.

Then a launch's internal-combustion engine caught somewhere. It began to run with a sort of purring roar. A harbor-launch. A police-launch, probably, ready to investigate the howls of fury on the harbor's still waters. If Tony were murdered here and now, his body might have to be slid overboard still unrobbed, and even that would be dangerous. More, he might kill somebody first.

The sound of the police-launch motor moved across the harbor. Then a voice grunted savagely on the *bakhil's* deck, and the group before Tony melted. Men swarmed to ropes and spars. The great lateen sail rose creaking against the sky, and men hauled noisily at a crude windlass to lift the *bakhil's* anchor. Then slowly, slowly, slowly, in what were hardly catspaws of wind off the land, the *bakhil* gathered way.

It moved creakingly but very smoothly over the water. When the police-launch came near, Tony tossed his cigarette overboard and blandly watched it go by. He was contentedly confident that all went well.

But his conscience wailed, as the police-launch departed. Now he would be killed, and there would be nobody in all the world who would ever admit to the least idea of his fate. He could be traced—perhaps—to Suakim, though even that was unlikely. But from Suakim he would have

seemed to have evaporated. With the dawn the *bakhil* would be remote from all witnesses to happenings on its deck. Tony would be murdered and robbed, and his few remaining possessions divided among these cutthroats who surely had no intention of taking him to any agreed-upon destination! And what good had he done or even tried to do? Even if he unthinkably escaped murder, now, he had not even pretended to make inquiries in Suakim on the probable products of Barkut, of the market it might offer for imports, or even of the possible profit in import-export trade! He had thrown away his life—and more, here Tony's conscience grew acrimonious—he had not made one single move that a brisk young executive would have made first of all!

But as the *bakhil* cleared the harbor and the wind freshened and she bent to the breeze, Tony smoked contentedly. He reflected that something like this untraceability was necessary for a journey to Barkut and other places not on typographic surveys. If the area about a gateway were ever searched for a person who had gone through it, that very search would change it, so that somehow it would cease to be a gateway. In ancient days, when news traveled slowly and searches for missing persons were unthought of, there must have been many gateways indeed. That would account for the wild fables which none believed, nowadays, but which were probably history in some co-existing world. Doubtlessly there was once a brisk trade between places where magic lamps were functional devices, and prosaic places like the world of Tony's youth. Now gateways were probably rare and trade almost non-existent. But not quite. He had the proof of that!

So Tony smiled happily in the starlight at the *bakhil's* stern. He let his imagination run riot in pictures of white-

walled cities under a brazen sky, and camel-caravens in slow motion over fabled sands, and—to be candid about it—he meditated with some interest upon the possibility of lustrous-eyed slave-girls whose sense of duty to their master might make them very interesting companions—if one happened to be their master.

When the sun rose he was still thinking about the sort of residence a successful young executive might set up in Barkut if that land were as uninhabited as the bald-headed man had suggested in the *shishkebab* restaurant. But about him there was no sign of any sort of civilization. The *bakhil* glided smoothly over waves that were neither high nor negligible. The sea was of an improbable but fascinating color. The sky was lapis-lazuli, and the *bakhil* was sheer archaic clumsiness. The heavy, bending boom which carried her mainsail seemed about to crack with its burden of patched canvas and the wind which strained it. The crew was as unsavory a gang of cut-throats as ever a director sought in vain for a motion-picture. There was not a man who did not carry a knife in plain view, and few who were not scarred by knife-slashes. The captain's face looked almost like a rough sketch for a crossword puzzle blank.

No one spoke a word to Tony, but all glowered at him when he met their eyes. The *bakhil* sailed on a course Tony could not determine, toward a destination he could not guess—except that it surely was not Barkut—and there was apparently no soul on board but himself who spoke English or had any feeling but that of murderous antipathy toward him.

He flipped the golden ten-dirhim piece and felt exceeding peace fill his being. Crew-members saw the glint of gold in the sunshine. If Tony moved from the rail and one of them could get behind him, the result, he realized,

the result would be final. If he dozed, he would wake in another world, but not very likely Barkut. His life hung upon the fact that he had a revolver, and that it might cost lives to kill him. But he waited contentedly all through the baking-hot day for nightfall, well aware that with the darkness plans would be made to abate the nuisance of his living presence.

Came the sunset. Glorious reds and golds. The surface of the sea looked like molten aureate metal. The whiskered villains of the *bakhil's* crew protested themselves in pious prayer unto Allah, and then began low-toned discussions over the most practical way of inserting some six or seven inches of steel into Tony's liver.

He beamed. He was alive. This was life and zest and adventure such as he had never known or dreamed of before. His conscience was despairingly silent. Tony would not have changed places with anyone on earth.

The sun sank below the horizon. Darkness seemed to flow over the world. Shadows appeared on the *bakhil's* deck, and Suhail, the great star, shone brightly in the dimming sky. Then it was night.

Men foregathered forward. And Tony tossed overboard his twentieth cigarette of the day, and heard it hiss briefly as it touched the water. He moved briskly.

The helmsman reeled and sank to the deck. Darkness hid the event, but he had been the victim of a scientific gun-whipping learned by Tony in a neighborhood movie palace. Tony re-pocketed the revolver, hauled the small trailing boat close under the *bakhil's* stern and pushed the great tiller hard over. The lubberly *bakhil* came heavily up into the wind and hung there, its lateen sail flapped crazily. The ship careened, the massive boom swung over and increased its heel, and then the *bakhil* seemed simply to shiver irresolutely, dead in the water.

Tony slipped over the stern into the small boat. He took to the oars as vociferous outcry arose on deck. He had no idea where he might be, only that he was roughly twenty hours slow sail from Suakim. He might be anywhere along the African eastern coast, or along either of two shores of Arabia! The essential thing was to get away from the *bakhil*.

He got away. When some sort of order had been restored on the ship, Tony was already lost in the darkness.

After an hour or so of steady rowing, Tony curled himself up in the bottom of the boat and went contentedly to sleep. His last conscious thought was a mild wonderment that even this landing-boat had a pervading aroma of fish, preal oysters, goat-hides, bilge-water, and the unwashed humanity that had recently occupied it.

He was jarred awake by the thumping of the boat's keel against something solid. He opened his eyes and saw a colossal, amiably stupid face gazing open-mouthed down at him. He knew immediately that it was an illusion because it was five feet from ear to ear and definitely on the misty side, a countenance formed in vapor.

He closed his eyes resolutely and told himself to wake up. When he opened them again there was nothing in sight but very blue, very clear sky above the gunwale. But the boat bumped again. Tony sat up and saw a sandy shore and a sandy beach—and a sandy stretch of pure barrenness beyond. There was no surf. Gentle waves were gradually edging the boat toward the strand on which the swells broke in half-hearted foaming.

There was just one really curious feature about the world he saw. That oddity was a minor, dark-colored whirlwind—actually a sand-devil—which wavered its way along the beach a hundred yards away. It looked—the thought was fanciful—rather like the picture of a *djinn*

coming out of a bottle that had been in a copy of *Arabian Nights* which Tony had owned as a small boy. However, there was no bottle—and the whirlwind was traveling in a wholly natural fashion. It went a couple of hundred yards further and then seemed to stop, spinning in a meditative fashion.

Tony sat at ease until the boat grounded finally. Then he seized the moment of a receding wave to step overside and walk smartly ashore without wetting more than the soles of his low-cut shoes. Safely on land, though, he was almost infinitely alone. There was sea on the one hand and sand on the other. That was all. There was not even a sea-bird flapping over the waves. But the whirling sand-devil remained. It was rather peculiar that it was so dark, when whirling above such white sand. It looked rather like smoke.

He flipped the ten-dirhim piece. He marched valiantly along the shore in obedience to its decision. He covered half a mile. The whirlwind persisted. It moved inland. It grew taller, as if to keep him in view. Odd. . .

Then three men on camels came over the crest of a sand-dune and halted, regarding him. He waved to them. They moved slowly toward him, shading their eyes to search for possible companions beyond and behind him.

They came closer, dismounted and regarded him ominously. They were whiskered, and very dirty, and they were almost certainly verminous. One handled a scimitar suggestively. The others carried spears. A half mile away, the small whirlwind moved restlessly, but the three men ignored it.

Tony flipped the ten-dirhim piece. It glittered golden in the sunshine. The expressions of the trio changed from merely ominous puzzlement to resolution. The short man with the scimitar swaggered up to Tony. The others

watch with glittering eyes. The short one said something guttural and threatening. Tony flipped the golden coin. The man with the scimitar grabbed—and Tony swung, hard. He felt a certain naive pride when the whiskered one went down. He snatched up the scimitar and said sternly to the others:

“I’m on my way to Barkut. I’ll pay you—”

But the other two men were coming for him at a run. They had very practical spears, which they carried in a decidedly menacing manner. They made for him from both sides, but the one on the left was nearest. Tony swung the scimitar wildly. His stroke neatly severed the head of the spear. He followed through. Somehow the second spearman got in the way. He saw his victim with unforgettable clarity. He was pure bearded villainy, with one eye and a sword-split nose. Then the scimitar landed. The result was lurid and unquestionably lethal. Tony wanted to be sick. To avoid it he turned on his two remaining foes. The short fat man was on his feet now, but still groggy, and the other spearman looked dazed. Tony chased the two of them with his reddened scimitar until they vanished over sandhills. They were headed straight for the whirlwind, but they swerved from it even in flight.

Tony stopped, panting. He went back to the scene of the conflict. But he carefully refrained from looking at the man he’d hit with the scimitar. There were three camels, kneeling. Tony wanted to get away from there, so he tethered two of them to the third and mounted that one, but nothing happened, so he kicked it. The beast came to life, rising hind end first, so that Tony nearly fell off. It resignedly began to move in some indefinite direction. The other camels followed docilely. The whirlwind

moved companionably along with them, never very near, and never quite out of sight.

Hours later—many hours later—a white-walled city appeared in the distance. Date-groves surrounded it. There were minarets within the wall, and the lacy structure of a palace. A camel-caravan moved unhurriedly away from the gates, bound for some place of mystery.

The whirlwind fell behind as Tony approached the city, but it stretched upward and upward—as if to keep him in sight—until it was but the most tenuous of mists. Then it vanished suddenly, as if it had collapsed.

Tony Gregg rode up to the nearest city gate and slid down his camel's fore-leg. Soldiers in turbans and slippers, carrying flint-lock muskets, looked at him in lively suspicion. He essayed to speak. They essayed to speak. Presently two of them took him gingerly by the arm and led him through the city streets. The smells and sights and sounds he encountered were those of a dream-city—though the smells were not exactly a pleasant part of the dream. There were flat-topped houses and veiled women and proud camels and bearded men. There were barred, narrow windows and metal-studded doors, and projecting upper storeys to the houses, which leaned out above the narrow streets and nearly blotted out the sky.

The two soldiers led Tony, thrilled and satisfied, into a dark doorway. They released him and stepped back. An iron gate closed with a conclusive clang. Tony blinked back at them and saw that the doorway was completely filled by a grille of very solid and very heavy grim iron bars. He was in a prison. He was in a partially open-air dungeon. He was, in fact, in the clink.

This was the manner of his arrival in Barkut.

To be Continued

How High on the Ladder?

BY LEO PAIGE .

MARKOWOV was worried. As Captain-Controller it was his place to worry when the sub-cruiser became involved in danger even though the situation was not a result of his own actions. The Life-Controller Officer had fallen into the main converter when the ship was hardly three days into sub-space. That in itself was reason enough for Markowov's worry, but to top it off the Androids, who were the special charge of the Life-Controller Officer, were now dying like flies and no one on board could do anything to stop their deaths. It was not the death of a few hundred androids that was causing Markowov's agitation. He was sufficiently hardened to the thought of Android death. After all they weren't people, only living forms of flesh constructed by the Life Scientists of Sol III to do a specific job. However, with the death of the Life-Controller it was almost impossible to manufacture new androids from the emergency supply of proto-media they carried. The full extent of the damage to the crew was not known and difficult to determine. His assistant was even now making a survey of the ship, but in the meantime Markowov could only worry while the ship hurtled blindly through the grey folds of sub-etherial space.

Minutes passed and then Markowov's first officer crawled slowly into the compartment and collapsed just inside the door. Quickly Markowov invaded his mind and with calm sure thoughts drove back the shrieking waves of pain and once more established the nerve block

which held back pain. His assistant regained control of his mind almost immediately.

"Thank you," his mind radiated. "For a moment the pain overcame my control."

"No thanks are necessary, my friend," Markowov's flashing thoughts negated the apology. "Both you and I know the quality of pain our bodies must endure in sub-space. Normally we stay immersed in a Type Ten Stasis Field and thereby nullify the Pain, but when we must move about—" His smooth pink head, devoid of any features save a mouth, turned slowly blue. His assistant recognized this as a personal habit that went with the thought, "There it is and there's nothing we can do about it," but he did not want to accept this as a solution to the problem. The ship needed someone to run it and if the crew were dead *they* would have to do it and the pain would be terrific.

"Isn't there some way to make the Stasis Field mobile?" he asked.

"Several ways," was the reply, "but that will not solve the need for motion."

Markowov looked down at his small slug-like body. Barely four feet long, it was merely a tube of flesh whose only function was to hold the organs which provided blood and nourishment for his brain.

"For generations," his thought proclaimed, "our race has had no need for extended motion. We are perhaps the only race in the Galaxy which may be considered as adapted for life in sub-space. Our tentacles," he extended the member delicately, "serve us for small precise movements, our bodies can exist for years in a stasis field and only *our* minds possess the power to repress the neural strains of sub-space and be able to control the androids.

Android life forms perform all our labors, why should we move about?"

"The argument is sound," his assistant considered, "with the exception, of course, that the fact that we *must* have motion is fairly obvious."

"True," Markowov's thought expressed sorrow. "We can of course pull ourselves along the passageways by means of our tenacles. However, that will require great expenditures of energy, so we must limit our movement to the barest essentials."

"There must be no waste motion," the assistant confirmed.

"Precisely," Markowov stated, "and to do that we must have a plan. You have been inspecting the ship. Open your mind so that I may perceive the condition of our command."

As the assistant's thoughts unfolded the picture of the androids, Markowov became more and more worried. The entire android crew was dead or dying with a peculiar virus disease. This disease was reacting on android flesh and was rotting it away, starting with the nerve cells and continuing until the entire proto-form was a mere handful of silvery-red dust.

Among the first to die were the members of the pilot crew and as a result the sub-cruiser found itself approaching the region of Von Heuyen's Star without a crew and still in sub-space.

Markowov knew, and the readings of the instruments in the pilot room confirmed his knowledge that the tremendous force of this giant star was such that it must be met in normal space. In sub-space the gravity force of this particular star was warped to such an extent that it could seize the ship and whirl it about its center and fling

it off at almost fifty times the velocity of ether propagation. Markowov was not very adept at these things, but he did know that the cruiser must be slowed to a speed below that of the ether propagating level in order to make the transfer back to normal space.

"Also," his assistant broke the train of thought, "this must be done before Von Heuyen's Star has a chance to capture us."

"Yes, of course," Markowov affirmed, "once we are enveloped in the folds of its gravitational field we are lost. The star can speed us to such a velocity that it will take three normal life times to slow sufficiently to return to normal space."

Markowov pondered this and announced that there was no solution to the problem save to re-breed a new crew. Markowov projected a full plan of procedure into the mind of his assistant. The thoughts were calm and confident of success, but his assistant's reply rose on the hysterical frequencies. The job could not be done. They were all doomed. When the Controller Officer had fallen into the converter a vial he was carrying had been thrown into the troughs containing the spare proto-media. It was all polluted; there was no way to breed another crew! No way at all!

"What!" Markowov's mind almost refused to admit the possibility of such calamity. "How bad was the damage? The nerve cells—the blood banks—the training records—— What of these?"

"They are all intact," was the reply, "but even though we possess the materials to train a full crew with the correct neuro-responses and even supposing we could learn to vitiate them, to what purpose would we direct our labors? There is no proto-media into which the gene patterns could be initiated."

Markowov's mind proved equal to the shock of this last blow and calmly without one trace of the worry he felt, Markowov began to discuss the situation with his assistant. Basically, of course, the problem resolved itself into the creation of life. Markowov could not run the ship himself, so a living organism must be bred to run it for him. However, the sub-cruiser, like the legendary maleless Planet of Ten Thousand Virgins, was full of breeding possibilities, but limited by one small detail.

Suddenly a clear thought drove into Markowov's mind. It would mean work and pain, but it would also mean life. His mind caressed the thought tenderly, for he had suddenly remembered that deep in its forward hold the sub-cruiser was carrying an elementary Bio-adumbrator for the Prome Protoplasm Laboratories on Sol III.

"But the instrument is packed for shipment," the assistant rejected the thought.

"I know that," was the reply, "but I feel sure that it will be fully charged and contain enough proto-media to reproduce at least one android."

Markowov lifted himself from the cushions of the statis field and began to pull himself along the floor with his tentacles. The process was infinitely painful and for a time there was no thought exchange between the two, requiring as it did all reserves of mental energy for the controlling of the pain.

They reached the forward hold eventually and began to unpack the Bio-adumbrator in silent striving, both working in mutual accord with a plan they knew was the only correct one. Only the assistant had doubts as to the feasibility of the plan.

"We have no training in the operation of this machine," he projected. "How can we be sure there are no mistakes?"

"Of that we cannot be certain," Markowov mused. "However, both of us have been trained in elementary bio-surgery and the machine contains complete directions. How can we fail if we are careful? Surely you will not admit that your mind is incapable of solving a problem when all of the factors are present?"

"No, of course not. My mind is capable, but are we certain that all data are present?"

"Certainly," Markowov's thought was almost contemptuous. "Look here." He pressed a switch and their minds scanned the thought record that was the operating directions of the machine.

"You will notice," Markowov interrupted, "that after operation Five there is no explicit direction as to the manner of procedure until operation Eight, and that the gap between is wide."

The assistant nodded and then wishing to appear as learned as his superior thought slowly, "The intervening methods must be exacting in their correctness. We should be able to fill in the details as we work. Will you want to create the zygote yourself?"

"My reactions are a little finer than yours," Markowov stated. "Yes, I shall do the delicate work. But let us begin. We do not have much time."

Reaching into the depths of the machine before him Markowov pressed a stud and started the Bio-adumbrator operating. As they had assumed, the instrument was charged to full potential and soon a small mass of proto-media was resting on the forming racks.

Now, following a mutual plan of action the two beings began to build the two separate gene patterns that would guide the growth of the things they wished to create. These extremely delicate patterns had to be formed on

micro slides and the inexperience of Markowov and his helper spoiled many of them before they finally succeeded in producing two perfect patterns.

Then Markowov injected himself with Neurol to kill the pain that was beginning to weaken his mind, and heighten his nervous responses for the ordeal to follow.

"You had better begin to form the proto-media," he ordered the assistant as he deftly wrapped the queer seven pronged tool he would use to blend the two gene patterns into the single android zygote.

As Markowov began the delicate operation his assistant flowed the almost living proto-media into a mould labeled, "Pilot Class IV-A" and began to lay the neuro circuits along the patterned lines on the surface of the mould. This completed, he began to establish the circulatory tubing in its proper channel and flood it with plasma.

They had timed their actions so perfectly that Markowov was able to hand the finished zygote to his assistant at the moment the proto-body was completed. The assistant parted the protoplasm and placed the almost microscopic zygote in its proper position. Markowov activated the small lamp-like ray tool that fused the zygote in its body of artificial flesh and leaned back with well earned thoughts of satisfaction.

The android was now complete and the assistant placed it in the evolvo-vat attachment on the side of the Bio-adumbrator. At the present time the android was only four inches long, but a few moments under the powerful evolutionary rays of the evolvo-vats and it would grow until it was as tall as Markowov and approximately his shape, except for the members needed to pilot the cruiser. During this time the organism would also be taught its duties as a pilot by means of the telepathic recorder that Markowov was now connecting.

- He closed the switch on the evolvo-vat and crawled back into the statis field with great relief. The job was done and within a few hours the sub-cruiser would be slowing to enter normal space under the able guidance of the pilot android that he, Markowov, had created. It made one feel like God to contemplate the action of creating life beyond the realm of natural reproduction.

Inside the vat the thing began to grow. The soothing rays of the evolvo-vat beat down on its flesh and it grew until it touched the smooth metal sides that surrounded it.

Somewhere within its being an essence began to pulse. The thing had a mind and it began to perceive that it lived. Up through the mass of sentient flesh glowed one supreme concept... *I am!*

Now the machine began to feed knowledge into its waking consciousness. Slowly, yet with ever increasing facility the being received the knowledge designed for it and projected by the thought wave of the machine. The forces playing upon its flesh were so concentrated and so designed as to cause the being to grow into a fully-reasoning mature example of its kind in the space of minutes. The time came when the machine could teach it no more and its growth ceased. Then a strange thing happened. Instead of sleeping until it was released the being opened its eyes. The optic nerve could see nothing in the blackness of the evolvo-vat, yet it wished to see, and released by that wish a strange mutant force, latent in its cells, sprang into being. The thing saw!

A fully matured being at the moment the teaching machine had stopped functioning, the thing in the tank was now acquiring a new set of senses. It was not a slave as it had been constructed to be. Far from it, since the creature was filled with a subtle essence not ordinarily

present in proto-media creatures. The Bio-Scientist of Sol III called this essence a soul and although they could not control it or define it, they did know that, in some cases, as now, two hours after the conception of the zygote, the soul appeared and could be detected.

The presence of this soul plus the terrible floods of cosmic radiation present here in sub-space were causing the still plastic flesh of the thing to mutate rapidly. Released by the desire to see, the latent forces in its body served to free its mind from the undeveloped brain Markowov had created for it.

In a space of seconds the thing's sense of vision expanded beyond the confines of the vat and spread throughout the ship. Its speed of learning was insatiable and in a few minutes it knew the complete working process of the ship and, so great was the change wrought in its mind, it could comprehend the idea of the infinite space beyond the ship.

It touched the minds of Markowov and his assistant briefly in its mental excursion and laughed at their infantile thoughts. Then its mind leaped away beyond the ship into the blinding floods of energy that filled the sub-space. The being flung its thought far into the region beyond the ship, but was forced to stop at the energy barrier that closed in the normal space-time continuum. Even the power of its mighty mind could not penetrate that barrier. Some day, strengthened by centuries of experience, it might acquire the force necessary to pass through from one space to another. Now, however, its powerful, yet immature, mind must utilize the machines in the ship it had left if it would go into normal space. That would mean once more occupying the clumsy body into which it had been born. With that thought the being

drove its mind back to the sub-ship, howling with frustrated anger.

Once inside the ship the creature's mind touched that of Markowov briefly, then retracted and watched warily as Markowov and his assistant released the clumsy body and guided it up the companionways to the control room. There the trained reflexes of the creature's inhuman body began to kill the speed of the ship and head it toward the barrier, while the automatic instruments began to shift the ship back into normal space. There was a peculiar wrenching sensation as the atoms of the ship and all it contained were whirled back into their normal positions. During this sliding movement from one space to another the being decided that the ship must be destroyed. Once in normal space its mind would be free to roam to the ends of the universe, but the crude body the mind now inhabited was no longer necessary.

Acting on that decision he snaked one of his tenacles across the control board and depressed the velocity lever. Swiftly the ship speeded far beyond the ether propagating level that was the limiting velocity of an object while in the barrier. The atoms of the ship abruptly gave up the sum total of their inconceivable energies in one blinding blast.

* * * * *

Jerry Thompson looked at the tape again.

"We've lost another one," he sighed. "What do you suppose causes it?"

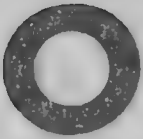
Peter Aronson, the head of Earth's Sub-space Bio-laboratories, took the tape from Jerry's hand.

"Switched over at too high a speed and exploded," he mused. "Too bad. Say, look, here's a recorder curve

Continued on page 113

The Man Who Lived Backward

BY RALPH MILNE FARLEY

 OUR ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS TRAVELING THROUGH TIME LIKE A train which runs at a uniform speed along a railroad track. We, the inhabitants of this universe, are the passengers of that train.

Are there other universes preceding us, or following us, along the track of time? We cannot tell.

Are there, perhaps, other universes hurtling toward us, back-tracking through time, traveling from the future toward the past? If so, if we ever meet one, our knowledge of it should be limited to a momentary "whoosh!" as it rushes by us.

Of course, there is the bare possibility that some day our own time-train and a time-train reversely directed may simultaneously break down at the same spot on the track — that is, at the same point of time. If so, then while these two trains are being repaired, it should be possible for some of us passengers to get off from our own universe and mingle for a few moments with the passengers of the other universe in the strange land beside the tracks.

But what if one of the passengers were to get back onto the wrong train?

One day when the big heavily-barred front door of Dr. Worcester's private sanitarium was accidentally left open, a middle-aged man ran backward breathlessly up the front steps and in through the door, and struggled frantically with the burly guards, who seized him and dragged him before the doctor. Dr. Worcester had him locked in a cell, pending an inquiry as to who he was and where he had come from; but not a single clue to his identity or origin ever developed. And so he was known merely by the number which was assigned to him: "Sixtythree". His case was unique and so baffling that Dr. Worcester kept him as a non-paying patient, instead of turning him over to the state authorities.

Sixtythree's spectacular arrival at the Worcester Sanitarium occurred quite a long time before I came to work there as gardener upon my graduation from the State Agricultural College two years ago.

I once overheard Dr. Worcester say to a visiting psychiatrist: "I can't help feeling that this man Sixtythree's perfectly sane. Look at his clear keen eyes. He seems to be merely perplexed by something — something about our world which, to his rational and well-ordered mind, appears to be irrational and out of kilter."

And Sixty-three always seemed to me, in the brief glimpses which I occasionally caught of him, to be almost normal, except for his strange penchant for doing so many things back-end-to, and except for the fact that he was totally devoid of memory and did not possess even enough recollection of events to be able to carry on a conversation or answer a simple question. Yet he could talk, after a fashion, and occasionally made some fairly lucid remark about some event which later took place. For example, I well remember the night when he woke up the entire Asylum by yelling "Fire!", just *before* the boiler explosion which nearly caused a holocaust. And occasionally he would answer some question *before* the question was put to him.

But as time went on, although he seemed to grow physically younger and more virile, his comprehension of what was going on about him seemed to dwindle. He became dully resigned to life; and this dull resignation was succeeded by irritability, and it in time by frantic violence, during which he screamed and called for "Margaret! Margaret Oakes!"

As each mealtime approached, Sixtythree's facial expression always portrayed intense loathing and nausea; in spite of which he always hurried to the table. But in his hurry he always ran stumblingly *backward*!

And then there moved to the town where the Worcester Sanitarium was located, a girl named Margaret Oakes, a very pretty blue-eyed chestnut-haired Irish lass. Word of the strange raving about her from this man whom she had never met, intrigued her to such an extent that she finally called at the Sanitarium, and asked to see the man. Dr. Worcester, hoping that she might throw some light on Sixtythree's past, eagerly consented to the meeting, which took place under heavy guard, near one of my flower beds, which is how I happened to be present.

It was a pathetic scene. Sixtythree, holding out his arms beseechingly, with a look of deep pain in his intelligent face, backed hastily away from the girl; then stood still, as she slowly approached him. To our surprise, she permitted him to clasp her in his arms for a long embrace, while he jabbered to her in a wholly unknown tongue, in which the words "gnillrahd" and "terragrahm" were frequently repeated.

When his hungry arms finally let her go and she walked slowly and

sadly out of the garden, he again held out his arms to her, this time with a facial expression of intense and eager joy, mingled with a certain tinge of perplexity, as though at her not being as happy at leaving him as he was to see her go.

He eagerly permitted himself to be led back to his cell, pricking up his ears happily at the last mention of Miss Oakes by one of the guards, and immediately thereafter lapsing into stolid unconcern.

In the weeks which followed, Miss Oakes came more and more often to see our patient, and at each visit the scene was repeated, but with a growing change. She submitted more and more warmly to his embrace, and he became more and more frantically worried at her arrival, and more and more overjoyed at her departure.

Then came an overcast and sultry day. Sixtythree was led out into the Asylum garden, pathetically wistful as usual. No, not quite as usual, for he was clothed differently: a knee-length toga, spiral leather puttees, and a fillet, instead of the conventional shoddy gray suit usually worn by inmates of the Worcester Asylum.

"Where'd Sixtythree get *that* outfit?" I whispered to one of the guards, who happened to come near the garden bed in which I was working.

"Dunno," he whispered back. "He must of made it in his cell. He had a lot of rags and leather straps and other junk in there this morning. Don't know where he got 'em from, though."

Then I noticed a strange man, bald headed and keen-looking, standing with Dr. Worcester. "Who's that?" I asked.

"Professor Pierce, from Columbia. Knows all about funny languages," the guard replied.

"What's he here for?"

"Dunno. Probably to check up on Sixtythree's screwy lingo."

Just then I overheard Dr. Worcester say to the Professor in a low tone of voice, "Now, Robert, please observe how Sixtythree greets his sweetheart."

Margaret Oakes was entering the enclosure. With a heartrending cry of "Gnillrahd! Tellagrahm!", Sixtythree, yearningly recoiled from her. Then followed a torrent of sounds in a strange language, as she walked up to him, and he clasped her in his arms.

The sky was growing dark overhead, an ominous warm wind had sprung up, and there were fitful flashes of heat-lightning on the horizon; the ground trembled slightly; but all of this served as a mere background for the inexplicable drama being enacted in the garden. Professor Pierce and Dr. Worcester were intently watching the two lovers, and I was intently watching Professor Pierce and Dr. Worcester.

The Columbia language-specialist cocked his ears and frowned perplex-

edly at Sixtythree's strange jargon, then smiled with dawning comprehension. "Simple, my dear Watson, absurdly simple," he declared. "For, although I can't make out the rest of the words, 'gnillrahd' and 'terragrahm' are merely 'darling' and 'Margaret', pronounced backward. Isn't there some well-recognized form of insanity which exhibits itself in the patient doing various things back-end-to? Such as mirror-writing, and the like?"

"Yes — there is," Dr. Worcester ruminatively replied. "It sometimes manifests itself in one obscure form of geriopsychosis. And, too — that might account for Sixtythree's grief at Margaret's arrival, and his joy at her departure. But how about all the other words which he babbles out so fluently. Do *they* make any sense when reversed?"

"No — they don't appear to."

Just then there came a sudden and resounding crash of lightning, the ground heaved and trembled, and a swirl of hot tempestous wind struck us like a hurricane, hurling us all to earth.

I opened my eyes to find myself lying, not in the soft garden bed where I had fallen, but rather upon hard and bare copper-colored rocks.

My garden was gone. The walls of the asylum yard were gone. In every direction stretched interminable copper-colored rocks like those on which I lay.

There was no trace of the storm which had just broken upon us in all its fury. Instead a pale sun shone down out of a cloudless salmon-pink sky.

Uncomprehension overwhelmed me. Wearily I stood up and stared dully about me. The four guards and Dr. Worcester and Professor Pierce and Miss Oakes were dazedly picking themselves up from the rocky ground, and brushing off their clothes. But the loony Sixtythree had disappeared.

Professor Pierce was the first to find his tongue. "My God, Alfred!" he exclaimed. "Where are we? What has happened?"

Dr. Worcester ran a tired hand across his eyes, blinked several times, and gave his head a vigorous shake.

"Please, don't ask me," he replied. "My mind can stand just about —"

"Look!" one of the guards interjected, pointing.

A short distance away on a little hill stood a group of about a dozen men and women, all clad in togas like the one which Sixtythree had been wearing. The men were clean-shaven with short curly hair bound with fillets, and all wore broadswords hanging from linked belts. The women's hair was done in two braids, and they had no belts, but otherwise they were clothed like the men.

The men of this group now drew apart from their women, and cautiously approached us.

Dr. Worcester beckoned the rest of us to him, and thrust Miss Oakes protectively behind him. "Halt!" he shouted peremptorily to the approaching strangers. They halted.

And now I noticed that our former inmate, Mr. Sixtythree, was among them, and like them he wore a belt and sword. He seemed to be the commander of the group, and gave no sign of recognizing any of us. Not even his own Margaret.

We were not much afraid of the strangers, in spite of their swords, for our four guards were burly brutes armed with blackjacks, and Dr. Worcester and Professor Pierce were tough birds, and I was young and wiry and in excellent physical shape because of my outdoor work.

I guess they sized us up in much the same way as we sized-up ourselves, for Sixtythree held up one hand in what we interpreted as a gesture of peace and good-will, and strode forward. He was no longer the cringing creature of the asylum, who used to do almost everything backwards. Now he was self-possessed and masterful. But the guards did not seem to notice the change in him.

"'Ere comes th' loony. Shall I give it to 'im?" muttered one of them; but Dr. Worcester shook his head. Then held up his own hand in imitation of Sixtythree's gesture, and stepped out in front of us.

Sixtythree smiled and nodded, although there still was not the least flicker of recognition in his face. Dr. Worcester too nodded; I couldn't see his smile, as I was behind him.

Dr. Worcester held out his hand. But Sixtythree shook his head, and placed his own right hand diagonally across his breast. Dr. Worcester did the same, and Sixtythree again smiled and nodded.

"Ask the fellow some questions," Professor Pierce prompted. "I want to get a line on his language."

Sixtythree cocked his ears at the sound of Pierce's voice, and seemed puzzled.

"Who are you?" Dr. Worcester asked him.

Sixtythree shook his head, and let loose a torrent of sounds strangely like, and yet unlike, those which he had habitually used in talking with Margaret Oakes in my garden. The Columbia scientist listened to him with narrowed eyes.

"Let *me* talk to him," Miss Oakes suggested, stepping forward. "He will certainly remember *me*."

The man in the toga ran his eyes over her, and smiled warmly. But it was a smile of appraisal and appreciation, rather than of love, or even of recognition. Quite evidently he was very glad to make her acquaintance,

but had never seen her before in his entire life. Margaret Oakes burst into tears.

Instinctively Sixtythree sprang forward, and placed one protecting arm around her. She laid her head trustingly on his shoulder and gazed up at him out of her big Irish blue eyes.

One of the guards sniffed, and muttered, "Well now everything's all hunky dory, ain't it?"

The togaed group, seeing that their leader had made friends with one of our party, now came trouping over, and we all exchanged salutations by placing our right palms on our left shoulders and bowing and smiling to each other.

Then an embarrassed silence fell. For a few moments both groups just stared and fidgeted.

Finally Professor Pierce stepped up to Sixtythree, pointed to himself, and said "Robert" distinctly, several times.

Sixtythree smiled, nodded, pointed to himself, and said, "Narden".

So that was his name, eh? Well, at least, a start had been made toward learning their language.

The professor then pointed to his hands, feet, mouth and nose; learning and teaching the words for these.

One of the togaed women was a beautiful golden-haired olive-skinned girl of about my own age, with big brown eyes and an elfin smile. Her name was Elva. She seemed to consider the word-swapping to be a huge joke, and soon she and I had drawn apart from the others, and were putting on a pretty good imitation of Professor Pierce, all by ourselves.

How long we were at it, I have no idea. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves — when suddenly I was snapped out of it by hearing Dr. Worcester shout to Professor Pierce, "Say, Robert, look!"

He was pointing up into the cloudless salmon-pink sky at the pale sun which was beating down upon us. Narden started jabbering at his friends, and they at him.

"What's wrong?" asked the Professor.

"Well, for one thing," the Doctor replied, "here we suddenly find ourselves whisked away from the earth, and dumped into a new and strange world! We are taking it altogether too calmly. Why are we bothering to learn the language of these queer people in togas, when the real pressing question is where are we, how did we get here, and what has become of everything else?"

"All the more reason then for learning the language, my dear Watson," laughed Professor Pierce, "for only these natives can answer your questions."

"Well then, my dear Sherlock." Worcester sneered. "the first thing

you'd better ask them is what is wrong with their sun. It hasn't moved an inch since we arrived here."

The four guards sat down heavily and despairingly on the copper rocks, Professor resumed his attempt at conversation with Narden, and I mine with Elva. It was a fascinating game, touching her cheeks, her hair, her eyes, her lips, her arms, to learn their names; and having her do the same to mine.

Our next interruption was from the Columbia Professor, announcing that he had at last mastered a few verbs and adjectives, and hoped soon to be getting abstract ideas across. And still the pale sun hung motionless in the center of the salmon sky.

Thus passed what may have been hours, or days, or weeks. We could not tell, with that motionless sun. At last we were all able to talk together with various degrees of proficiency. We learned that these togaed folks were *not* natives of this peculiar land, which was as strange to them as it was to us. Their own world was much the same as ours; and they, like us, had been precipitated here by a sudden lightning bolt and earthquake shock.

And still the pale sun hung motionless in the center of the salmon sky.

The other group had arrived here quite a while ahead of us, and had explored for miles, finding nothing in all directions except a desolate copper-colored waste. But, until Dr. Worcester had let out that yell and had pointed to the motionless sky above, even they hadn't noticed that phenomenon. Now they realized that although they had not eaten nor drunk nor slept since their arrival, the equivalent perhaps of several months of ordinary time, yet they were neither hungry nor thirsty nor tired. Like the sun in the salmon sky, bodily functions appeared to have come to a complete stop. What little experience we from the earth had yet had with this paradoxical land, confirmed this observation.

"But why ain't we worrying about the fix we are in?" wailed one of the big guards, shifting uneasily. "And how does that loony Sixtythree suddenly become saner than all the rest of us, all of a sudden?"

"We *are* worrying, my good man, we *are*!" Dr. Worcester retorted. "But some kind of defense-mechanism is causing us to devote a feverish activity to learning the language of these friends, and to teaching them our language — anything which will keep our minds off the absolute unreality of our predicament. For that way lies madness."

"You'd oughter know, Doc," agreed the guard, grinning; but immediately relapsing once more into gloomy silence.

And still the pale sun hung motionless in the center of the salmon sky.

But Elva and I didn't care. Nor, it seems, did Narden and Margaret.

And thus dragged on an idyllic existence, while time stood still. We needed no shelter, for it never rained. We took no rest, for we were never tired. We did not search for food or drink, for we were neither hungry nor thirsty. We did no exploring after the first few "days" (or what would have corresponded to days, if time had existed), for apparently the monotonous rocky landscape stretched off forever in all directions.

We two pairs of lovers had plenty to keep us busy, learning all that we could about each other, and about what life had been like on each other's worlds. Elva was particularly intrigued with our methods of transportation, and with the fact that our trains were confined to running on rails; for in her world (further scientifically advanced than ours, in spite of what their simple costumes might appear to indicate) most transportation was accomplished by gyroscopic helicopters hurtling through the sky.

Professor Pierce studied and taught the two languages. One member of the other group was a scientist of that world from which they had come, in the same inexplicable manner as we, to this middle ground — this no-man's land. His name was Luthor. He and Dr. Worcester argued together for "hours" (or what would have corresponded to hours, if time had existed) as to how we all happened to be here, and as to the dual existence of Narden-Sixtythree in both their world and ours simultaneously up to the time of our meeting here. They built crude apparatus and performed certain physical experiments with them, explaining that this was for the purpose of trying to fathom the nature of this strange "continuum" — I think that's what they called it.

The other members of the two groups fashioned rude dice out of the copper rocks, and gamed interminably, as the pale sun hung motionless in the center of the salmon sky.

My Elva had had sufficient scientific training in her own world to be able to take part occasionally in the discussions between Dr. Worcester and the scientist from her world, and she kept me posted as to their conclusions. It was she who evolved the suggestion that our two planes of existence had each been back-tracking through the other's time. Dr. Worcester stated that he remembered reading somewhere in the voluminous writings of a great British physicist, named "Eddie Something," that, although entropy (whatever that is) marks a physical distinction between past and future, the *direction of flow* of time is a mere peculiarity of our particular type of consciousness, and that other human beings differently constituted might sense its flow in the opposite direction.

The analogy of the two railroad trains was Elva's; also the suggestion that these two "trains", instead of whoosing past each other, had for some reason stopped side by side, and that our two groups had gotten

out to chat together and become acquainted alongside the tracks of time. Which was why time was now standing still for all of us.

"But here the analogy ends," Elva had explained. "For if Narden had gotten onto a wrong *railroad* train, he would merely have been carried on with it; whereas, by getting onto the wrong *time* train, his inverted time-sense caused him to back-track into your past."

"Is that why he said 'Margaret' and 'darling' backward?" I asked.

"Yes," she continued. "And that is why the past was a closed book to him, and why he could remember the future. This is why a meal seemed to him to consist in disgorging his food onto a plate; no wonder he ended ('began', to you) each meal thoroughly nauseated!" She shuddered prettily.

"But he eats the way we do, regardless of how it may seem to him," I objected.

"Yes," she replied. "Luthor and Dr. Worcester have figured that out too. Although the mental processes of Narden Sixtythree ran backward in time, yet he had to adapt his *physical* life to your standards, in order to continue to exist in your world. Eventually, as he lived on into your past, he even learned to reverse some of the English words which he is learning here; so that they would sound right-end-to to your ears. Thus the two scientists explain the seeming inconsistencies of his existence."

Narden himself accepted, eagerly accepted, the theory of the two time-trains; but he rejected, as being inconceivably absurd, the suggestion that he and our insane patient, Sixtythree, were one and the same person.

"Merely a remarkable resemblance," he insisted. "This Sixtythree persons stayed behind when the earthquake shock occurred, just like millions of others on your world. Why pin his past onto me? It makes my blood boil to think of my Margaret in that crazy fellow's arms. If time ever gets repaired and starts up again, I plan to get onto Margaret's train, if it be humanly possible, and travel on with her 'until death us do part'."

"And you, Elva?" I eagerly inquired.

But with tears in her eyes she shook her head. "No, dear," she said. "I could not bear to be as out of touch with you, dear, as Narden has been with Margaret, each appearing to the other as an utter lunatic."

I stormed and begged. "It would be enough for me, sane or crazy, just to hold you in my arms," I insisted.

But she remained obdurate. "Neither of us can come with the other, anyway. Narden alone can 'get onto the wrong train' so-to-speak, when the two 'trains' start up again."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Because, if I should come with you, or you with me, the intruder would already have lived backwards through the time of the other. And the fact that this has not happened, proves it not to be so."

"If you won't come with me, I'll go with you," I stormed.

But she sadly shook her golden curly head. "Nothing can happen in your future on my world that has not already happened in my past there," she replied. "But come. Let us enjoy what fleeting moments we can together, here beside the tracks of time."

I brightened. "Perhaps they'll never get the two trains started again," I hopefully suggested.

But again she shook her head. "Narden's presence in your past, known to you as Sixtythree, is proof that your train will start again and that he will go with you. — But kiss me, dear, and let's forget."

I clasped her avidly in my arms.

A shadow fell over us. I released my Elva, and glanced up. Clouds were gathering in the salmon sky. The pale sun was becoming obscured. Lightning flickered across the face of the clouds. The copper rocks trembled slightly.

Narden and Margaret stopped their love-making, and stared at the sky. Professor Pierce, who had been jotting down conversation in his notebook, closed it and shoved it into his pocket with an air of finality. Dr. Worcester and Luthor the scientist broke off an argument in which they had been engaged. The gamers ceased their gaming. We all grouped uneasily together, and stared above us at the rapidly gathering storm.

"Well, goodbye, my dear friends," Dr. Worcester spoke with forced gaiety. "I guess our trains have been repaired, and are about to start. It's been nice knowing you."

I clung to Elva with a sudden frenzy of realization.

Narden, alone of all of us, seemed perfectly cool. "I'm going with Margaret!" he exulted.

"You fool!" Dr. Worcester shouted. "Don't you realize that it means a life of insanity for you."

But Elva listlessly interposed, "There's no use arguing with him, Doctor. Nothing that you can say or do, can alter the past. Don't you realize that Narden can't help going with you? He has already proved this by being the Sixtythree of your past — his future."

"Then you come too, Elva," I begged.

She stared at me in horror, then longing, then despair. "I cannot," she cried, flinging herself into my arms. "The past record of your world proves that I cannot."

Just then there came a sudden and resounding crash of lightning, the

ground heaved and trembled, and a swirl of hot tempestuous wind struck us like a hurricane, hurling us all to earth.

I got up out of the garden-bed in which I was lying, and stared about me at the familiar scene of the asylum enclosure.

The four guards and Dr. Worcester and Professor Pierce were picking themselves up from the ground and brushing off their clothes. Margaret Oakes was lying in a crumpled little heap, sobbing. The rain was pouring down in torrents.

There was no sign of Elva or Narden or Luthor or any of their compatriots.

"Elva! Elva!" I cried.

But she was gone from me forever, on that other world from which she had come. Narden, on our world, was traveling backward through the past which we had already experienced. We had known him in that past as Sixtythree, the asylum inmate.

Through the driving rain, a young white-coated doctor rushed out of the sanitarium building.

"Are you all right?" he cried. "I saw you all kneel over when the lightning-flash came, and I got here as quickly as I could. But what has become of Sixtythree? He was standing there with you, just before the flash."

"Sh!" Dr. Worcester admonished, pointing to the crumpled figure of Margaret Oakes.

Then he and the young doctor carried the girl into the building while the rest of us plodded on behind them through the rain.

Oh, Elva, Elva, I haven't even the satisfaction of knowing that you on your own world are longing for me as I long for you here. For, as your world hurtles through time from my future toward my present, you haven't yet made my acquaintance; you do not even know that I exist.

And when, according to your inverted time-sense, you finally do meet me and then pass on into my past — which event will become further and further ahead of you as my kind of time goes on — then you will long for me in vain, knowing that then I am still a carefree boy, not yet having met and lost you, my one and only love.

But tragic though this paradox is for both of us, it is nowhere near as tragic as the life of Narden-Sixtythree — a life half sane and half insane (or, from his own viewpoint, sane in a topsy-turvy world) — a life with two beginnings, and a mid-point, but no end.

PLANET OF NEW MEN

BY BASIL WELLS

FROM HIS CRAMPED HIDING PLACE IN THE THICK LAYER OF CURD-like insulation between the inner and the second hull of the spacer, Bill Guthrie could hear the shuffling of many feet along a nearby corridor. In a matter of minutes the *Bramley* would ground on the ice-covered derelict planet that had swung into Sol's family but five years since.

The bows jets were flaring, Guthrie could feel their powerful hammering through his ancient space suit's insulation, and he wondered how the three thousand green-clad Reborn packed into the ship's too-few cabins had come through the past five days of space flight.

Probably they were as glad as the rangy newswire reporter to know the voyage was ended. For them Glaca meant a new raw world that was to be their home. On Earth, Mars, and Venus they were shunned and despised by their fellows. The fact that science had swept their criminal minds clean of memories, making them children in adults' bodies, meant nothing. Science might change their faces and minds, argued the mobs, but once a lawbreaker, always a lawbreaker.

Guthrie found himself wondering whether the Thirtieth Century system of dealing with criminals was superior of that of bygone years. The cruelty of Tri-Planet Government's unthinking billions drove many of the Reborn innocents to suicide or a return to crime. It was like thrusting an eight-year-old child into battle with a space pirate to expect the Reborn to fit themselves into that hostile environment.

So when the Corporations had offered the Reborn free transportation and homestead sites on their Glacan concessions the despised

men and women had eagerly agreed. And they had gone by the thousands—into a silence that no newswireman had yet penetrated. . . .

It was to learn more about this mysterious ice-sheathed planet and how the Reborn were building a new life for themselves that Bill Guthrie had stowed away aboard the *Bramley*. It had cost him two thousand *stars*, the familiar name applied to interplanetary credits, to bribe two spacehands to claw out a sizeable chunk of spongy insulation pellets and plant a roomy space suit there.

He planned to slip out of the spacer with the Reborn, mingle with them in their young cities without the Corporation's lawmen, or any of the patrolmen, discovering him, and board the ship again when it returned from Venus with a fresh load of workers or supplies. . . .

The spacer jolted sickeningly—five or six gravities as the forward jets braked it. Instinctively Guthrie slapped shut the suit's tough glast helmet and locked it there. He knew that a collision of some sort was imminent.

Not until later did he learn that a small party of Reborn, planning to turn space pirates, had seized a small freighter and blasted off. . . . Just as the *Bramley* nosed majestically downward!

The two ships met—and burst apart like fragile bits of glass! Guthrie was hurled, unhurt but battered, between knifelike shards of twisted metal, into empty space. Debris floated about him, and bodies.

He was dropping swiftly, his body swinging horizontal with the plateau a scant thirty miles below, for the moment. Then he was dropping headfirst, and shortly afterward his heavy boots were beneath him.

"The spinners," he heard his labored voice muttering dazedly. His limbs were leaden, heavy and dull as his muttered speech. "Gotta free 'em. Or they'll need—atom seine to find pieces."

A long time afterward he was startled to hear a sobbing gush of laughter. It was strained and unreal. And coming from his own throat! Shock, probably. He'd felt the same way after *darciun* smugglers dropped a few ounces of explosive *protonite* on that Venusian cavern's entrance four months before.

He fumbled feebly with the spinner release. With the lightweight nested series of broad-bladed spinners supporting him, a hundred of them, he could ground safely on Glaca's soggy crust. His fingers strengthened and he tripped the plastic-handled lever.

The spinner came free, expanding upward and outward jerkily, its blades spinning to ease his downward plunge. Abruptly a wrenching jolt ended this braking of his flight and Guthrie saw the torn harness of his spinner drifting higher and higher above his plummeting body.

He cursed the two spacehands who had packed this disused old suit into the space ship's self-sealing hull, and then was heartily ashamed of himself. But for the suit he might not, he *would* not, now be alive.

All the time the glaciers and rocky hills and plateaus of Glaca were expanding beneath his bloated legs. He could see the tracery of rivers and scattered jungle patches of Martian *reth* along them. He caught sight of a dozen sprawling settlements, rude buildings of the Reborn who were clawing the mineral wealth of Glaca from her mines for shipment to metal-starved Earth and Mars.

A flyer, a sturdy triangular wing driven by twin jets, was climbing toward him from the city almost directly below! Guthrie felt his stomach turning over with hope and, at the same time, a measure of fear. . . . If the pilot of the flyer didn't see him!

Then the wings rocked and the ship came steeply up under his shooting body. It banked in a tight circle and came down until its transparent hood grazed his legs. The mechanical fingers of Guthrie's suit groped for, and found, the narrow opening at the sky roof's rear that the pilot's frantic gestures revealed. He locked them there.

"I'm Captain Ackerson of the TPGP," the pale-skinned, sleekly handsome pilot of the ship announced as soon as they had landed and Guthrie was freed of his suit.

Guthrie fell back upon his pose of stupidity. It was not hard for him to do since his sleepy gray eyes and his lazily slumped rangy frame helped the illusion. He had no intention of revealing his real identity and yet to explain that he was a Reborn, as his forged papers would reveal, might be contradicted by his imperfect knowledge of what a criminal, given a clean blank mind, was being taught by the School.

"I—don't understand," he said uncertainly. "Who am I, and where . . .?" He rubbed at his head where a slight bump was very fortunately lifting.

Ackerson scowled. "Must have taken quite a rap," he said. "Give me your papers." He swore at Guthrie's uncomprehending

stare. "In your pocket," he snorted, and jerked them from the newswireman's grasp.

He studied them and then jabbed a finger toward several acres of low rock-and-mud-walled buildings. A high wall of stone rimmed them.

"Go over there and eat," he ordered. He handed back the papers. "You're Gordon Williams. Remember the name. I'll have your memory back the next time one of my men is required to use darcium."

Guthrie started off uncertainly. Captain Ackerson called after him and scribbled something hastily on a scrap of paper.

"Give this to the guard," he said. "No use saving your hide and letting them kill you to make you talk."

A quick squint at the note told Guthrie that Ackerson wanted them to disregard the new Reborn—that he was suffering from spatial amnesia, a curious but not too rare affliction that seldom lasted many hours after landing. Then he began puzzling about how he could best escape the threat of a darcium-sharpened mentality.

With darcium threading their blood and vitalizing their brain cells even the most stupid humans could peer into the minds of their neighbors. For that reason Venusian darcium, the seed or the powdered meat of the seed, were forbidden to any but the policing agencies of the three inhabited planets: Earth, Mars, and Venus.

A darcium addict, for there were smugglers of any forbidden and dangerous drug in the raw frontiers of space then even as today, could spot him as an imposter at once. And an addict's mind was clouded by the accrued knowledge and undercurrents of hatred and lust that eventually would drive him insane. How much simpler, then, it would be for a trained patrolman to learn, with the aid of darcium, that he was really Bill Guthrie, a wealthy newswire reporter.

That meant he'd have to be leaving this Reborn settlement soon, and quietly.

The dark blue uniform of the guard blocked his progress. He held out his bit of paper, Ackerson's note. The guard read it, spat, and shoved Guthrie through a narrow gate that pierced the stone wall. As Guthrie passed he saw that the guard wore his Reborn wrist tag, a flexible brassy looking armlet with his number and name inscribed, on his right wrist.

A second gate swung open before the newsman and he was inside the walled area.

Hundreds of men lounged on benches fronting the wheel-rutted narrow street he entered. Projecting eaves formed a sort of porch in front of the barracks and here the warmly clad Reborn found shelter from the chill mistiness of Glaca's day. From the nearest group three big men in Reborn green coveralls advanced on him. All were Terrans.

"Transfer?" one of them demanded. He was red-faced and fat.

Guthrie pointed upward and shrugged his shoulder. "From out there," he said numbly. "Don't know where." He handed over the note and his papers.

The big man laughed. "This here's a Reborn off that transport the boys cracked into. Too bad they didn't make their getaway. . . . This's Gordon Williams the papers say, and he's got a touch of spatial amnesia."

The other two men snarled disgustedly at Guthrie.

"Clumsiest trick Ackerson's tried to pull yet," one of them said. He hooked his big fist into Guthrie's green jacket and rammed his whiskery jaw forward. "Shoving a spy at us this way."

The red-faced man let his fingers bite into Guthrie's shoulder.

"Maybe he is a space drunk," he said reflectively. "He's dumb and sleepy looking. We'll get Darcy Mike and check up."

With the three men guarding him Guthrie was pushed into the nearest of the filthy low-walled barracks. One of them went off to hunt for Darcy Mike, and in a few moments returned. As the hazy-eyed oldster, he was almost a dwarf, teetered uncertainly into the room Guthrie saw the telltale deep red stains of darcium seeds upon the old man's bushy gray beard.

"Out with it, Sleepy," prodded the red-faced giant. "What's your real name and why are you here?"

Darcy Mike was chuckling now. He had come within a few feet of Guthrie and his drugged brain was receiving the impulses of Guthrie's mind.

"He's a spy all right, Griff," he grunted to the shorter giant who had brought him here. "He's a newswire man trying to smuggle the truth about Glaca back to the Planets. His name's Guthrie."

The big man's red face cracked into a smile. "I've heard of you, Guthrie. We get newswires here even if none go out." He offered

his hand. "I'm Ladner, this's Porter, and this big-nosed golpon is Griffin Snow. He's the oldest Reborn on Glaca, I expect."

Guthrie eased out a breath of relief. "Had me worried," he admitted. "First time I ever was glad to have my mind probed."

"Plenty things we can show you and tell you, Guthrie." Ladner's big face was serious. "We came to Glaca from the Schools expecting to be allowed to colonize this new planet. Instead of that we are restricted to certain areas, policed by the TPGP, and our medical care and sanitation are forgotten."

"Live like cattle," agreed the dark-faced man with the outsize nose, Snow. "Conditions in the ocean cities of Venus and Earth were bad enough for we Reborn, but we were protected."

Guthrie nodded thoughtfully. "I've suspected something like that," he said. "Otherwise the Corporations wouldn't be objecting to any of us visiting this world. . . .

"And another thing—how about forgetting the Guthrie? I'm Williams, 'Sleepy' Williams, if you want to call me that."

The three men nodded agreement. Darcy Mike was sleeping on a soggy blanketed shelf of earth so he heard nothing. Only Snow's painful pincer-grip on the old man's elbow had momentarily aroused his drug-fogged brain.

"Go along with Snow," said Ladner. "He's been around. The three of us run the camp—saves the Corporations plenty stars for supervisory personnel but the Reborn get a better break than they would from those grafting space lice."

The newswireman nodded his agreement. Now that he knew he was safe for a time, weariness was making his knees buckle. He followed Snow down the muddy streets, past the curious Reborn throngs who shouted greetings at the big man, to a carefully built stone building of two stories.

There he tumbled into the nest of blankets assigned him and the murmur of nearby voices blanked out.

Close at hand a newswire was chattering threadily. He recognized the voice of Thorpe Donley and the exquisitely-shaded pronunciation of Filsari Antriad's feminine voice. The Martian woman was giving beauty hints.

Guthrie threw off the blanket that someone had thoughtfully tossed over him. He saw that the other five elevated platforms were empty of sleepers and a glance through the narrow window

told him that the sun was high overhead. Since Glaca's day was thirty-three hours he had been asleep for almost that long.

The long low room, with its sturdy supporting beams of compressed *reth* fibers, was closed off at the rear by a partition. The sound of the recorded news and other features came from there, and so he walked quietly in that direction.

He pushed open the door and looked out into a long narrow kitchen where an ancient, almost prehistoric, type of brick-sided cookstove was radiating warmth. On its flat metal surface covered dishes of heat-resistant glass and plastic gave off appetizing odors. And on a clumsy table of compressed *reth* the small plastic news-wire producer was humming.

A dark-haired girl, her long slim body stretched out boyishly in a chair, her clumsy shoes propped on a stool, reached hastily for a faded long-sleeved blouse of the familiar Reborn green. She put it on and stood up angrily, her oversized feminine leg tubes swishing. Her face twisted, falling into the hideous wrinkles and hollows of an old woman, and suddenly she was bent and shrunken.

"I'm afraid," said Guthrie gently, "you forgot something."

He pointed to a gray wig that had fallen to the roughly matched slabs of the floor. The girl exclaimed and let her face return to its natural contours.

"Now that you know," she said, "I suppose I will have to go back to the women's barracks."

"Perhaps," agreed Guthrie.

The girl's green-flecked eyes brightened in her fair-skinned oval face. They were weird eyes set slanting in her smoothly perfect features.

"You are not like these other helpless ones," she exclaimed excitedly, coming closer. "Your mind has not been blotted of memories and replaced by a childish hodge-podge of knowledge. You can understand the danger that faces Glaca and the Reborn."

"I wouldn't say you are a user of *darciun*."

"And I am not. Some of us have the gift. . . . I am Wiltha Rennick. To all the others I am a Reborn. That you now know is untrue. But I need helpers. We must save Glaca from space."

Guthrie pulled the stool over to the table and reached for a container of crackers. Wiltha pushed a platter of synthetic yeast-beef closer, and laid a sharp knife near a loaf of crusty bread.

"And by space you mean . . . Glaca is due to slip from her

unstable orbit about Sol? Crash into the sun or wander off into space again?"

"The sun will claim her. For five years, by Earth reckoning, have we circled here between Venus and Terra. Unless stabilization is effected within a few days Glaca will dip too near Sol and be torn from her orbit."

"Pleasant thought," muttered Guthrie, slicing into the long loaf of bread. "That's what the scientists feared before the newswire syndicates shamed them into silence as space-happy old fools."

"Now that I look back most of those debunking news spools were owned by the Corporations. They're after all the metal they can get, even if every ton means a human life. Always been like that."

"In the last few months," Wiltha said angrily, "they've removed almost all of the mining machinery and they are shipping their ore refineries back to Earth and Mars. They know the end is near."

"The patrolmen and company men will be saved—they've seen to that—but the Reborn will die with Glaca."

"And us with it," nodded Guthrie, taking a bite of the tasty meaty-flavored yeast, "just like the Reborn. Means we'll have to get back to Earth somehow and blast the whole dirty story."

"Too late for that, Sleepy," said the girl. She caught his puzzled glance. "I know you're Guthrie but that's what Snow told me you were to be called. . . . In a week we'll be heading sunward. I'm scientist enough to know that."

"Our only hope is to escape and go into the mountains. There are buried cities scattered all over Glaca. And signs that show that once before they drove this world out into the interstellar void to escape catastrophe."

"But in a few days," argued Guthrie, "there's nothing we can do. We can't learn how they did such a mighty piece of work or hope to duplicate their equipment."

"There are stories," said the girl hesitantly, "that all of them are not dead—that they are emerging from below as the planet warms."

"It's a long shot," Guthrie said dubiously, "but anything's better than sitting around waiting. Let's get moving, Wiltha."

The girl laughed. "Later. Tonight in fact. Snow and perhaps Ladner would be helpful if you could persuade them to come along. We will need strength like theirs."

Guthrie studied the girl's mysterious eyes. He wondered what

she knew about Glaca and its secrets that she had not revealed. And then he felt hot blood pounding in his ears as he remembered her mind-reading ability.

"Look Rockland over," she told him, "what there is of it. See the modern housing and well-paved streets of this restricted area. You'll have a story the Corporations won't like if you ever put it on wire."

An hour's tramp through the fouled narrow alleys between the rows of poorly built barracks was enough for Guthrie's space-toughened stomach. Men drew their water from open muddy streams that ran through the ugly huddle of buildings or from shallow dug wells.

There were no medical supplies or trained medical officers available for the barracks. But for the good fortune of a surface mine of poor grade coal within the walls they would have had no heat. And, other than the vegetables grown in minute garden patches along the outer wall, there was only the edible tough leaves of the quick-growing reth to supplement their dehydrated synthetic fare.

This was slavery that was without historical parallel since the Nazi Empire collapsed ten centuries before. No longer did Guthrie wonder that the Corporations refused to permit any private spacer to approach within a hundred thousand kilometers of Glaca.

He entered Snow's two-storied dwelling again, and headed toward the kitchen. His steps slowed as he heard angry voices. One of them he recognized as Wiltha's but the other, familiar though it seemed, he could not place.

Noiselessly he approached the door. Perhaps it was but a friendly argument—yet there was something of hysteria in the girl's frantic voice.

"I've suspected something like this," the man's amused voice announced, "when I saw you walking along the street. Your face and body were that of an old woman, but the way your legs moved was young."

Guthrie was through the door. Holding Wiltha's struggling body in his arms was Captain Ackerson. He kissed her and the girl's hand tore free to rake its nails along his close-shaven jaw.

"Snow won't be home for an hour yet," said Ackerson, snaring her hand, "so don't tire yourself fighting. Kiss and sniff star dust with me for a moment."

Wiltha squirmed and her knee slammed in an unladylike fashion into the pit of the patrol officer's stomach. The sleekly moustached captain's smile was strained.

"You may be an officer, Ackerson," said Guthrie quietly, "but you're a fused jet as a lover."

"Guthrie!" gasped Wiltha, tearing herself loose. "Why, Sleepy," she tried to correct herself, "aren't you working today?"

Ackerson's hot green eyes drilled into Guthrie's. His hand went down to the zero gun belted at his slim waist.

"So," he said, smiling tightly, "your memory has returned, Williams. Only you're really Guthrie. We've heard about you—been warned you might try to land on Glaca."

He drew his weapon and trained it on the newsman. That he had forgotten Wiltha was but to be expected, a Reborn woman would not think of attacking a uniformed man. And so her heavy shoe lashed up with all the strength of her right leg within it and the zero pistol jarred from his fingers.

Guthrie sprang across the intervening two paces in a single long pounce. His right hand snapped the patrolman's shoulder about and his left hand smashed Ackerson's jaw. Then he was hammering his fists into the man's middle and Ackerson was fighting for his life with every hacking twisting trick of his early military training.

But the captain had met his match in Guthrie. Guthrie's father was wealthy and the newswireman had been instructed by experts in the ancient art of self defense. He fended off the bone-crushing slashes of the patrolman and continued to land blows. He closed Ackerson's left eye and was battering at the other when the hideout gun, an ugly flare-snouted rocket pistol, came into Ackerson's hand. "Drop it!" commanded Wiltha sharply, and then Guthrie felt a chill tingle along his side as the zero gun, she had picked up, fired.

The rocket hideout gun clattered to the stone floor and Ackerson staggered back, his left hand gripping his unbending, white fingers. He snarled like a cornered Venusian *kaft*, and *kaftlike*, sprang at Guthrie with bared teeth and clawing hand.

A single smashing blow finished the patrolman's charge and Guthrie used the man's own belts and straps of woven glass to bind him. Then he turned to Wiltha.

"That means we get out of here full jet," he gasped. "Hope you didn't use full blast on his hand, Wiltha. He might die without proper care when we leave him here."

"That would be no loss," Wiltha answered sharply, "but I can assure you he is in no danger. A bad nip of frostbite is all. He'll do to take along."

"As a hostage you mean?" demanded Guthrie.

The girl shook her dark hair out of her eyes and smiled.

"As so much muscle and bone," she said. "We'll need him and one or two others."

"Lead off then, Wiltha," shrugged Guthrie, "you know more about Glaca than I do."

He picked up the patrolman's gun and turned toward the girl. She was stuffing food and cooking utensils into two water-sealed sacks.

"About time for the mines to be opened," she said. "We'll wait until Snow comes back to the barracks. We'll need him."

She pointed under the table. "Pull up that large stone and reach into the opening that runs under the wall. This wall was here when the first transports arrived and Snow used this section of it, intact. That's why I came here to cook."

Guthrie moved the heavy table aside and clawed up the stone. A moment later a section of the wall moved inward and then slid horizontally away to the left, revealing a narrow descending ramp of deeply-scored stone.

"What's all this?" a heavy voice demanded, and Guthrie turned to see the dark-skinned Reborn who had brought him here.

"We're escaping from the barracks," Guthrie told him, the rocket pistol in his hand half-lifted and ready. "We want you to go along."

Snow's glittering black eyes studied the girl, puzzled. It was apparent that he had never seen her before—except as a wrinkled old crone come to cook for them. Then his gaze caught the bound shape of the patrolman and his body shook with the sacrilege of it. Fear of the Patrol, almost worship of its uniformed men, was drilled into the childish brains of the changed criminals.

And here was a patrolman, bound and abused, lying in his home! Guthrie could read the play of emotions that flickered across the simple childishness of Snow's features. But after a moment Snow's dark eyes brightened. He had worked on Venus and on Earth before being shipped to Glaca, and he had acquired a more adult viewpoint.

"He's a traitor to the TPGP?" he said eagerly.

Guthrie nodded. "Sold out to the Corporations. We're going

to take him along. Make him confess to a darciun-sharpened official of the Tri-Planet Government."

He went to Ackerson and tore the patrolman's mental shield from about his neck—the tiny broadcaster of waves that blanketed its wearer's thoughts. He smiled, flashing a meaning glance at Wiltha.

"Now he's on the same level as we are."

"Get any weapons you have, Snow," said the girl crisply. She took her cue from Guthrie. "I'm a special agent, sent here to learn about the mistreatment of the Reborn."

Snow's teeth flashed and he hurried up the steps in the front room to his upstairs sleeping blankets. While he was gone Wiltha and Guthrie dragged Ackerson to the ramp and lowered him into the darkness below. Guthrie followed and found the patrolman's solar torch. He uncapped it and studied the dank arched passageway that bored eastward under the confining wall.

Then Snow was with them and they slid the stone and the table back into place before closing the hidden door again.

Snow slung Ackerson across his thick shoulders and, with Wiltha going ahead, they went splashing forward through the shallow chill pools of the ancient way's floor.

It was morning across the uplands. The sunlight was warm, for the ice-damp fog of the lowlands could not reach these heights. Here in the twisting interlocked tangle of rocky gulches and arroyas rimming the eastern mountains' lower slopes the four weary-legged human beings rested.

After a time one of them stirred; Guthrie. Quietly he got up and went out from under the low roof of the shallow cave they had discovered. He looked out over the steaming lowlands where the Reborn were housed and where the Corporations' refineries and foundries were located—what few of them remained.

Ten miles they had come through the darkness, with only Earth's blue light for a moon. Through patches of reth jungle, pushing its fleshy short-lived growth twenty feet and more overhead, they had toiled, and across barren patches of ice-scoured granite and shale. And now they were safely concealed in the rocky badlands of Hummer Mountains waiting only for darkness to continue their quest for the buried cities of the fabled ancient race.

Fifty feet away the long coarse-leaved clumps of growth from Mars, reth, shared with willows and other spreading growth the

moisture of the ravine's meandering rill. Glaca was awakening to life again, her long-dead soil nourishing these importations from other worlds.

As he watched the largest stalks of reth withered, their strawy long white seeds spilling out upon the ground, and the six-hour cycle of their life was ended. Glaca was like that, her brief rebirth of life was doomed to a fiery destruction. . . .

"Such gloomy thoughts," whispered a soft voice in his ear.

He turned to see Wiltha smiling down at him. He offered her a place beside him on the ledge but she shook her head.

"We will save Glaca," the girl said. "The Reborn will have their world, or part of it, and my people will . . ."

"Your people," broke in Guthrie, "what do you mean by your people?"

"That," cried the girl, her mysterious green-flecked eyes laughing, "is my secret. Sometime you will know. But for the moment I am merely the agent of my race. For the good of all mankind Glaca must be saved."

"I agree," the newswireman said. "Our civilization is starved for metals and other rare elements. We have stripped the asteroids and the moons. Glaca is invaluable."

Wiltha's eyes were more enigmatic than ever as she turned away, and Bill Guthrie scowled as the suggestion of an amused sound reached his ears.

He turned again as heavier shuffling feet approached. It was Snow, yawning and rubbing at his fuzzy blur of thin dark hair.

"Sleepy," he said, stretching, "did you know there's another cave back of this one?"

Guthrie got up. "No! Maybe it's what Wiltha's looking for."

"Drill marks," Snow said, "in places. But they're not recent."

Wiltha had come back to them from the cave's shadows. She had heard Snow's message for she was smiling.

"Lead the way, Snow," she said eagerly.

Guthrie urged Ackerson to his feet and checked the bonds on his arms. The patrolman cursed him as he touched his swollen hand. They gathered up the food and blankets and the big-nosed Reborn uncapped the solar torch before he headed back into the shallow cavity's rear.

A section of carefully-cut gray sandstone had slipped in its socket of softer rock leaving a narrow crevice. They squeezed

through, into a wide, high-vaulted corridor that was patently artificial.

"There is yet time," Wiltha murmured excitedly. "We will find the city of the Sleepers and then open the sealed chamber . . ."

She broke off confusedly, looking up into Guthrie's accusing eyes.

"Better tell us what you know about this hidden city, hadn't you?" he said softly. "We want to be prepared and you seem to have been here before."

"I landed near here," she said swiftly, "but my spacer was damaged in landing. I followed a tunnel, not this one, and found a strange lighted city, empty of life. And, in my exploration of the buildings I found sealed transparent domes—with humanoids, beings identical with Earthlings to all appearances, sleeping inside."

Guthrie tugged at an earlobe as he followed the bobbing flare of the solar torch. Ackerson was ahead of him and Wiltha was stepping close on Snow's heels. The faint slit of daylight wavered, thinned, and vanished behind them.

"Guthrie," said the patrolman softly, "you've got to let me go. This woman's part of a devilish scheme to take over Tri-Planets Government. She's as much as admitted her membership in some outlawed nation or race. Do you want equality of citizenship we now enjoy broken up into dozens of warring states?"

"I didn't take it that way, Ackerson. Most of us like to remember we were born in North America or Central Venus. We're all citizens under the Tri-Planet Government, but our own section of a particular planet claims our affection."

"This talk of Glaca falling into the sun is madness," said Ackerson, shifting his attack. "The scientists have exploded that theory."

"Whose scientists? The Corporations'?" Guthrie chuckled. "But I will gamble with you. If, a week from today, Glaca is not headed sunward, you can go free."

Ackerson cursed the newswireman briefly, and after that walked along in silence. It was all the confirmation Guthrie needed for the truth of Wiltha's story. The TPGP captain had spacers readied to evacuate his men from Rockland before the week was gone . . .

The tunnel dipped steadily downward. As they walked the air grew imperceptibly warmer until they were all sweating. They halted to rest where five narrower corridors intersected the one they followed. Snow tugged off his soiled green blouse and the

others followed suit, Guthrie freeing Ackerson's bound arms while they rested.

Wiltha started to spring up, a startled expression on her face, and then, from the darkness, a score or more of hurled ropes and crudely fashioned nets fell upon them.

Dark figures came out of the gloom to draw tighter the nets. Guthrie caught sight of heavy hammers and knives in the waving fringe of manlike upper limbs menacing them. He fought hopelessly against the spiderweb of unyielding cords and leather. He could hear Snow's bull bellowing voice abruptly cut off, and then a blast of icy atmosphere told him that Wiltha's gun had blasted its frigid beam of death into the ranks of the attacking creatures.

His hideout gun, Ackerson's actually, contained but two rocket shells. Now he fired these. He saw three of the charging shapes stumble and go down. But the blast had torn through the nets and as he hurled himself against them again they parted.

He staggered forward, dazedly, trying to regain his balance. He caught a brief glimpse of Wiltha, her gun poised, free of the nets, and then he saw a thrown club dash the weapon from her fingers. He saw a looming dim shadow before him and slashed at it with the stubby barrel of his rocket pistol.

Then something, a hammer perhaps, smashed sight and hearing from his body, and he was riding, unevenly, along a dusky river of night.

Ahead a light grew stronger. His head throbbed, every throb a dull stab of pain. The lights grew. He realized that he was being carried across the broad shoulder of a manlike brute, carried deeper downward into the rocky depths.

And there was light down here!

The realization made his fuzzy brain fight off the pain. He struggled and his human-shaped captor put him down. In the semi-dusk of the broad tunnel he faced the creature—and laughed.

For they had been captured by escaped Reborn! Several of them wore tattered green blouses and their green shorts were equipped with zippers for attaching protective leg tubes. Without a doubt these were all escaped miners.

"You can walk from here on," grunted the red-whiskered Reborn.

"Where are we going?" demanded Guthrie, "and my friends—the girl and Snow?"

"Lantz'll tell you all you need to know," growled the Reborn,

shoving Guthrie forward. "As for the girl—she got free."

Guthrie remembered, with an empty feeling in his chest, that Wiltha's gun had been knocked from her hands. With that she might have effected a rescue. Now he was on his own. Anyhow Wiltha was free.

As the light strengthened he saw Snow's broad back up ahead, and beyond that Ackerson stumbled along between two of the ragged Reborn. Snow and Ackerson were both bound and, even while he wondered why he had not been similarly treated, his guard twisted his hands together and knotted a length of rope about them.

"You may be one of us," apologized the red-bearded man, "and Lantz'll let you join up. Only you're with bad company. Snow and Lantz hate each other—Snow wouldn't let him run the barracks. And no patrolman or Corporations man is going to live long around here."

"But Snow's a Reborn," Guthrie argued. "Surely you don't plan to keep him prisoner!"

Red Beard gurgled deep down in his hairy chest.

"He won't be a prisoner long," he said. "We don't get much sport down here in the city, see? But every so often Lantz turns a few prisoners loose with knives or clubs and let's them fight. One left alive is free to join up."

Guthrie shook his throbbing skull as though to throw off something clinging and foul. Here was more proof that pushing the sketchily educated Reborn out among a hating adult population was a tragic error. In their childish rebellion against the cruel treatment accorded them they had reverted to the primitive savagery of ignorant ancient natives.

The guard was still talking as they approached the brightness at the corridor's end.

"Sometimes he sets wild dogs, we got them and horses and Venusian *caroffe* birds down here, onto the prisoners. There's sport for you. Barehanded I've seen a man best six of the hungry brutes."

"Sounds like the ancient Latins and their bloody games," said Guthrie in a choked sort of voice. "Didn't the Schools teach us that human life is sacred?"

"Ho!" scoffed the other. "That's stories they cooked up. So we'd feel good. We know we was all wrong ones—maybe pirates, or assassins. People told us we was like that, see?"

The men ahead of them were suddenly gone and before Guthrie could say anything more he found himself looking down into a vast perfect half-sphere of softly-glowing life. Brush, grassy fields and many buildings were scattered across the square mile of the sphere's hollow interior. There were no large trees, only clumps of the same swift-growing reth that covered the surface, and the grass, also, was of Venusian origin.

The escaping Reborn had made themselves a snug refuge here in the depths. Horses, fat, dumpy caroffe birds, and goat-like miniature cattle grazed the fields. Reth's edible leaves and pulpy new shoots supplemented their vegetable gardens, and Guthrie saw several fields that were being tilled by naked guarded men—slaves!

He felt like laughing to keep from crying. They had escaped from one slavery, the Corporations' type of slavery, and immediately they had captured other Reborn. That was humankind's nature—the pitiless law of the strongest mastering the weaker—a law that even forty centuries of growing wisdom and culture had not eliminated.

"When we come before Edgar Lantz," said Red Beard, "kneel and cover your face as I do. It is a custom Lantz acquired from a teacher in the School on Luna. Always he was made to do so before the instructor beat him!"

The trail they followed came at last to the largest of the simple white-domed buildings near the hemisphere's center. They entered, guards and prisoners together, moving quietly along a spacious dust-marked hall, until they passed through a great metal door opening on a single vast room.

On a raised platform of rocks, strewn with dried reth fronds and grasses, squatted a huge muscular ape of a man. Seven feet in height he must have been, and the arms and legs of the gross-bodied Reborn were as hairy as his matted black chest. He wore only a soiled pair of green shorts and belted about his hairy waist was a zero gun and a long-bladed knife in a homemade sheath.

The final incongruity of his appearance was his brutal broad-nosed face—it was pinkly and freshly clean-shaven.

"So!" rumbled Lantz getting to his feet. The six club-armed Reborn about him stepped swiftly out of the way.

The guards were down on their knees, hiding their faces, but Guthrie was glad to see Snow and Ackerson standing.

"We will have good sport tomorrow," laughed Lantz, throwing

away the greasy bone he had been stripping of meat and wiping his hands on his stomach. "Snow and Ackerson with their bare hands and all the hungry dogs."

"I'll fight you, Lantz," challenged Snow, "any way you want. I beat you twice before. I can do it again."

Lantz growled deep in his swollen paunch. His guards were watching eagerly, their eyes shining in anticipation of a battle.

"You are a prisoner," he declared, dipping his hairy paw into a platter heaped with badly-burned lumps of meat, "and until you have won freedom I will not kill you. My men must have sport."

Snow snorted his disbelief. He fingered his huge blade of a nose, grinning broadly as he let his gaze run over the green-clad Reborn around him. They were scowling at Lantz.

"However," Lantz rumbled, bolting a great lump of dripping blackened flesh, "the other prisoner is not bound for the arena. He can win his freedom if he defeats me."

Guthrie was conscious that all of the men were looking at him. It was him the ready leader of the escaped Reborn meant! He saw Ackerson send an encouraging wink and, for the first time, he felt a measure of respect for the patrolman. Ackerson had courage.

The Reborn guard removed his pack and unzipped the leg tubes from his shorts. Edgar Lantz rubbed the back of his hand across his meat-stuffed mouth and came to meet the smaller man.

"No weapons," said the king of the Reborn thickly, but he did not put aside the zero gun.

Guthrie lifted the arms lashed together before him. "Do I fight him like this?" he demanded.

Wordlessly the guard slashed his bonds off, the blade carving a careless groove across his numbed wrist as he did so. Guthrie set to work rubbing sensation again into the stinging flesh as Lantz waddled heavily nearer.

He circled the giant Reborn, fighting for time. His head was hammering madly and weakness made him stagger lopsidedly at times. Lantz was tossing looping powerful blows that he barely avoided, and the guards were taunting him—calling him a caroffe bird and a rabbit.

But movement was what Guthrie needed. His head still throbbed like a rocket jet at takeoff but his steps grew more sure. Lantz was blowing already. He could prolong the battle indefinitely

by keeping out of those apish arms' reach if he wished to.

"Close in!" roared the giant Reborn. "Make the dancing master come to me and fight."

"Take him!" cried Ackerson. "Kill him, Guthrie, and you will be leader!"

"Ha," grunted Lantz breathlessly, "it is I who will crack your neck once I grip your flesh."

The guards were circling closer about the two men, closing in. Every second narrowed the circle hemming them in.

Guthrie lashed out with his fist, twisted under Lantz' hammers of fists, and sent the hairy giant spinning off his hip to crash a dozen feet away against the legs of his men. He watched Lantz crawl upright again, his clean-shaven face crimson with rage, his lips slavering, and he crouched expectantly.

At the last instant before the impact he shifted his position, seized the Reborn's thick wrist as he fell away before that massive bulk, and once again Lantz sailed through the air to land heavily on his neck and shoulders. This time blood was worming from the broad nostrils of the Reborn and a puzzled expression of disbelief and fear was on his ugly features.

They came together gingerly this time, the long arms of the Reborn hacking at Guthrie. And the newsman felt the momentary surge of new strength that had come to him weakening. The blow on his head was sapping his vitality. It was now or never that he must down the apish leader of the hidden men.

He feinted, ducked and danced. Lantz pounded the air where he had been. Suddenly he came up under a looping right of the Reborn, inside the careless guard of the big man, and the hard back of his open hand axed, twice, into the pulpy fatness of the giant Reborn's throat and neck.

There was an explosive sound, muffled and abrupt, and Lantz' head was crooked on his shoulders as he crumpled to his knees and so to the ground. He did not fight up again. He was through with fighting, and eating, and boasting, forever.

Guthrie stood, swaying on his feet, until the guards came about him and bore him along to the rude dais they had constructed for Lantz. He knew that there was something he should say or do, but that last attack on the huge Reborn had sapped all the strength from his body. His voice was an uncertain croak.

With a throbbing roar darkness closed about him, and he felt himself falling backward. . . .

Guthrie was sleeping on the dry mat of reth and grass when the sounds of shouting aroused him. He sat up, pleased that his head was clearer, and looked about the huge U-shaped room.

He was alone. Bowls and platters of food were heaped at the base of the stone platform, and in a large crystalline goblet a muddy brown liquid had been poured.

The shouting increased. He could hear the snarling of dogs, and then a yelp as of pain. Of course! Stone and Ackerson were to be turned loose with a dozen starving dogs tomorrow. But this was—tomorrow! He had slept, or been unconscious, for a long time.

Across the big chamber he ran, welcoming the weighty slap of the zero gun's holster at his hip. He was out the door into the hall beyond and a moment later stood outside in the bright radiance of the sphere's interior.

A hundred yards distant a massive wall lifted above the street level, a wall connecting two of the graceful domes of the vanished race they sought. And upon this wall the fugitive Reborn clustered thick as Venusian minnows. He crossed the intervening distance swiftly and climbed the ribbed ramp to join them.

In a grassy courtyard, containing at the most an acre of ground, Snow and Ackerson stood back-to-back fighting off the ravenous dog pack. And five unmoving blots strewn about them showed that they had not been idle.

Guthrie wasted no time. He lowered himself over the wall, dropped a long five feet, and raced toward the snarling battle. While, from the walls overlooking the improvised arena a roar of mingled rage and puzzlement went up to the rounded ceiling.

Ten feet distant he drew his zero gun, adjusted its power to maximum—a tight beam that congealed liquid into solids at a few degrees above Absolute Zero—and turned it full upon a ribby beast who came leaping at him.

He depressed the button again—and again! There was no answering blast of frigid force. The dead Reborn's weapon had been drained of its solar energy and was worn merely as a useless badge of authority.

The wolflike brute sprang, and as Guthrie tried to sidestep he brought the useless gun crunching down on the dog's head. Then he was down on one knee from the impact and swinging the gun down again.

The brute rolled over, snarling, and a third blow stretched him

kicking. Guthrie turned toward the others; he saw Snow grip a bony throat in his bleeding hands and twist, and he saw Ackerson smash a yelp from a canine throat with a sweep of his booted toe.

And the dogs had had enough. They retreated, snarling, to fight, wolflike, over their dead fellows. Guthrie and the two others went the opposite direction, toward a steep stone ramp that mounted the rear wall of the courtyard.

Guards reluctantly stepped aside as Guthrie shouldered his way upward. He heard the muttering of disappointed Reborn who had come to see fellow humans ripped into bloody shreds. Nevertheless they gained the top of the wall before they encountered any actual resistance.

The red-bearded guard of the preceding day and a score of his fellows bunched before the ramp leading downward to the paved avenue at the court's rear.

"Where you taking them?" he demanded.

"The dogs are beaten," Guthrie said, "so now they are free men. They are going with me to my—my rooms."

"You can't pull nothing like that," Red Beard grunted. "We ain't all so sure you're a Reborn, see? So we fed Duffy, here, some darcium. They's plenty of it growing wild on Glaca. We'll see what he says."

He turned toward the jostling knot of men atop the wall.

"Whereat's Duffy?" he demanded.

The newswireman looked at Snow, questioningly. Snow scowled and shook his head. Once they discovered he was not a Reborn they would tear him apart. To these outlawed childish savages all mankind was a potential menace.

They dove together, as though at a signal, into the legs of the guards barring their way. Men spilled off the ramp, sweeping those below with them, and then the three were off the wall and racing for the shelter of a building across the avenue—a simple dome of pure white material with its oval entrance door slid open a fractional distance.

Hurled knives and hammers of metal and stone thudded around them. One struck Snow a glancing blow on his elbow but his pace did not slacken. They were almost at the entrance when Guthrie saw a green-clad youth, a zero pistol in his hand, standing calmly in the slitted entrance.

The gun came up and a chill of fearful coldness, of tiny ice crystals forming in the air above, touched him. The gun was

aimed too high but he heard a terrible cry from the pursuing Reborn mob. And a moment later he was wrenching the weapon from the hands of—of Wiltha!

It was Wiltha, firing over their heads into the blood-hungry Reborn, who had stood in the doorway.

They pushed inside, Ackerson sagging wearily against the side of the building, his bloody hands moving aimlessly beside him. Guthrie took his arm and pulled him along. Then Wiltha and Snow slid the huge door shut and fastened its massive, beautifully decorated locking mechanism.

"Nothing short of explosives," said Wiltha, "can stir that door." Then she hurried on to explain how she came to be watching from this building. . . .

"After they had gone I went back to the intersecting corridors and searched for the zero pistol. I was sure it had not been found for I heard them cursing as they searched for it.

"I found it at last and managed to steal into the city unseen. And, since this is the hidden entrance to the vaults of the Sleepers, I came here. Since you had been captured my only hope seemed to be to take four or five prisoners from among the Reborn."

She smiled uncertainly at Guthrie. "They were not here when I visited the city last," she said. "You know I would not lead you into a trap!"

"Of course you wouldn't, Wiltha," agreed Guthrie.

A rumble of sound, of regularly-spaced rocket blasts, came louder and louder through the white walls of the dome. Snow hurried to a high oval window and pushed the button that cleared its opaque shutter.

"Rocket tanks!" he cried out. "TPGP tanks that have somehow discovered our whereabouts. They're flying down into the city!"

Wiltha turned on Ackerson. Her eyes blazed angrily as they seemed to bore into his hidden brain cells. She turned, after a brief moment, to Guthrie.

"It is all my fault," she said bitterly. "I was too careless in my exploration of his thoughts. You were too much on my mind, and so. . . ." Her eyes dropped as she broke off abruptly, and she bit her lip.

She pointed to Ackerson. "Tear off his belts, in one of them there is concealed a transmitter with his individual wavelength. That is what led them to us."

Ackerson laughed. "Hard to get ahead of the Patrol," he said.

"Now if you will all surrender to me before my men arrive I will promise to do all I can. . . ."

"We're not interested," snapped Wiltha. "I know what you're thinking. We're not interested in saving our own lives. We want to save a planet from destruction and give the Reborn a fair chance."

Ackerson shrugged resignedly. Wiltha slid her two hands over the glittering black squares that alternated with the dome's whiteness to make a shoulder-high checkerboard. There was a click and a section of the wall slid inward and to one side as had the ancient door in the wall of Snow's kitchen. Meanwhile the transmitter and Guthrie had met.

They went down into blackness. The glast belt, with its miniature transmitter crushed, again bound Ackerson's arms. Their only light now was a faded band of radioactive matter placed at ankle height along the narrow corridor.

Abruptly the smooth floor ended. Sections of rock had fallen from overhead and littered the way. They struggled over them, a hundred feet and more, with their eyes slowly adjusting to the pale gloom.

Wiltha's soft full voice stopped them. "Here," she said, "is the entrance to one of the vaults where the Sleepers lie. But a great stone bars the way. . . . It was for this I brought you with me."

Guthrie peered through a misty oval window, set in a massive door of ageless silvery metal, and saw a great, low-ceilinged cavern with its floor dotted, mushroomlike, with scores of transparent thick-walled domes. In each dome, on soft couches, there lay silent shapes. Beings as human as any with him, he thought. Yet they had lain here, frozen with their sunless wandering world, for countless ages.

"Here's the stone," Snow said, "that locks that other one in place. Once we've heaved it out of the way. . . ."

But it was only after a dozen slabs of rock had been rolled and slid aside that the four of them at last succeeded in clearing the door. Then Wiltha worked at the battered knob that controlled the lock, her bloody nails staining its glossy silver. Her breath sobbed.

With a groaning reluctance the door moved. It grated slowly outward as Guthrie and Snow added their strength to that of the girl. And Ackerson? With his hands freed to help move the stones?

Guthrie heard his boots clicking back along the way they had come even as the door slipped smoothly into its grooves and meshed into its wall socket. No use trying to catch the patrolman now, he knew. He would be up the grooved ramp, by now, and pushing aside the concealed wall section.

A terrible shriek of agony and a breeze of icy air came from the tunnel.

"His own men!" said Guthrie pityingly. "Poor devil. He was a brave man despite his faults. But it is justice."

"Help close this door!" Wiltha cried urgently, "or we'll all be like him."

The door ground shut and she spun the lock, dogging down the inner handles. Then she led the way to the nearest dome, pulling a compact medical kit from her pack as she walked swiftly along. Guthrie shrugged and followed her.

She slid a panel aside in the wall, stepped into the narrow lock beyond, and Guthrie pulled shut the panel behind them. The inner lock swung open and they were smelling the rubbery burnt-sugar stench of the sealed dome.

"Air conditioning units must be going," muttered Wiltha as she stripped the intricately-wired, flexible, arm and leg tubes from a silent dark-haired young man's limbs. "Time was calculated almost too closely."

She opened her kit, revealing a nested series of hypodermic needles and syrettes, and set to work deftly and surely as any spacer's medico. She went rapidly from one couch to another until she had injected three of the Sleepers with the gold-tinted serum in the three syringes she had prepared.

Then she turned and smiled at Guthrie, relieved. She proffered the zero pistol and motioned toward the lock where Snow's dark, big-nosed face was peering hesitantly in at them.

"I think our troubles are over," she said, her features bathed in the pale blue light from the twin twisting tubes in the little dome's center. "When these men awaken they will push the patrolmen back to the surface again."

Guthrie swore under his breath. "So this's why you brought us here? Glaca's not in danger. You—why you're one of these people, Wiltha! You've used me to awaken them so they can conquer our worlds!"

The girl shook her head wearily. "No," she said, "I did not lie. Glaca is doomed unless these, my countrymen, are revived

from their sleep. I am a Sleeper. I confess it, proudly. But we seek no conquests or power."

Guthrie jammed the zero gun into his empty holster. Against his better judgment he was convinced that Wiltha was not lying. He stepped toward her, to touch her, to take her in his arms, and she smiled gravely as she pointed again toward the lock.

"Later," she said. "Now the patrolmen are working at the entrance to the cavern. If you can hold them off for a few minutes. . . ."

Guthrie spun about on his heel. He nodded swiftly. This uncanny ability of Wiltha's to read his mind could be really bothersome. Right now she knew, without a spoken word, that he loved her. He swallowed. Sure! He hadn't admitted it before but he did love her. He turned when he reached the lock, to tell her not to worry about anything, but she had gone into the little dome's center with her gleaming hypos ready to free others of her kind from their slumbers.

The newswireman pushed open the panel and joined Snow. Together they went back toward the locked door to the upper tunnel and the city.

"Can't do anything," Guthrie said, "until they break through into the cavern. Then I'll use low power waves, a loose beam that'll frost their trigger arms. Giving you a chance to get a gun or so."

"Now you're jetting," agreed Snow heartily. "But you'd better check that ice gun—it's been used plenty."

Guthrie whistled as he studied the miniature dials registering the energy stored in the solar packs of the weapon.

"Less than one second of effective power," he said. "That means I get one try and no more."

"Sleepy," said Snow, grinning at the tired, battered appearance of the newsman. "Just what are you getting out of all this trouble besides a headache and a few scars?"

"Oh, a story that'll blow a few hundred human spaceworms like Metab Rewer and Glen Faust out of their easy berths on the Corporations' executive boards. Maybe they'll end up, changed like the men on Glaca. I'm still of the opinion that a clean brain outclasses a prison."

"With equal opportunities and no hatred, yes," agreed the dark-skinned Reborn. His elbow joggled Guthrie's ribs.

"They're burning through the cavern wall this side of the door."

"Better get ready, Snow." Guthrie steadied his zero pistol across a concealing section of grayish rock. "I'll let three of them through. Should handle that many."

"That all you're getting out of this fight?" asked Snow, returning to his earlier question.

"Maybe a raise, Snow," chuckled Guthrie. "*Stellar Newswire Service* might give me ten or twelve stars extra a week."

"And you with four or five million credits left by your father?" Snow grunted. His eyes never left the crumbling wall of the cavern but Guthrie could hear the break in the Reborn's voice as he paused.

"We Reborn who worked on Earth know about you, Guthrie, and we're proud of you. We know that your mother was a Reborn, even though your father tried to keep it secret. And we know that you sold all your Corporations holdings to fight for us."

"That's all rocket dust," Guthrie scoffed. "It's the story I'm interested in. I'm for fair play, sure, but I'm no reformer."

Snow's big fingers clamped down hard on Guthrie's arm, and his stocky powerful body tensed.

"Here they come, Sleepy," he said, "so blast off!"

As the third patrolman eased warily through the steaming slit that ravening rocket blasters had chewed through to the cavern Guthrie jabbed the zero gun's firing button. While that brief flash of cold endured he swept it over the trio. Then it was dead—the batteries drained of solar energy—and Snow was racing from the rocks to the white-fleshed bodies of the three men.

Two guns he retrieved swiftly, tossing them behind him to the newswireman, but as he reached the third man a concentrated blast of frigid hell raked the Reborn and his surroundings. He half rose to his feet and then toppled forward, shattering like a fragile bit of glassware as he struck.

The ground was bristling with ice crystals and white frost. Nor had the patrol weapons spared their own comrades. The TPGP, Guthrie told himself grimly, needed a complete overhauling. They were careless in their dress and their training was of the sketchiest. No patrolman of the preceding centuries would have killed his comrades needlessly as these had been killed.

If he got out of this without a frosted skin, he promised himself, the ears of several TPGP officials would burn when they listened to his newswire column.

He found one of the zero guns and then the other by wriggling

among the sheltering rocks. They had finished Snow but they knew that Guthrie and the girl were still alive, and so they held back until two miniature tanks, insulated and equipped with a rocket gun and a zero tube, could be brought down through the tunnel.

Time was what the girl had asked for and she was getting it. A quick glance at the dome showed him moving figures within. The Sleepers were alive again, ready to help save their world from the sunward doom it faced!

And then, even as the first tank came purring through the narrow slot in the rocky wall, Guthrie saw Wiltha burst through the outer lock and circle the low dome to crouch, trembling, behind it! While from the dome there erupted a madly cavorting flood of men, their pale bodies clad in oddly fashioned tunics of gleaming material.

The men in the two tanks, both of them had come through while he watched, turned their guns on the milling knot of Sleepers. A frozen swath ripped through their ranks and the survivors, snarling like wild beasts, charged the tanks!

Guthrie ripped open one of the zero guns. He'd seen an expert alter the leads from the solar packs so all that stored mighty energy was vented in one explosive surge through the weapon. But he was no expert—the gun would probably blow up in his face!

A brief second was all it required. He closed the gun and drew it back ready to hurl across the rocks at the tanks. He measured the distance mentally, pressed down the button into its locked position, and let it go spinning off his fingers at the last of the two little tanks.

He dropped between two huge boulders, a third, higher one before him as a shield. The earth seemed to sprout up in front of his refuge, debris raining down as the explosion rocked the cavern walls. A section of pale, red-veined alloy, the rustless alcion that was standard for all Patrol equipment, almost clipped the ear from Guthrie's yellow-haired skull.

He rose to his knees. The tanks were split open and overturned. He was pleased to see that none of their occupants were badly injured; all four men limped hastily through the cavern wall as the madly screeching Sleepers bore down upon them.

Guthrie stared, horror-stricken as the eleven Sleepers swarmed over the frozen bodies and the littered tangle of the ruined tanks. For the faces that he saw were the blank-eyed twisted caricatures

of those calm faces on the couches. These were maniacs!

Even as they died, their insane gibbering cutting off in his ears as the zero guns of the TPGP flared freezing death, he thought he understood. Their bodies had revived from the ages-old sleep but their delicate brain cells had suffered irreparable damage. It was that deterioration that accounted for their unreasoning assault on the attackers. They were less than animals.

Guthrie slapped a burst of icy power into the slitted opening the patrolmen had blasted to let them know he was still there. Then he circled down across the cavern to where he knew Wiltha would be. There would not be another assault on the cavern now until the heavier tanks could be brought up.

"Now," ordered Guthrie as he slipped an arm around Wiltha's waist, "that's enough. Something went wrong. The lights weren't right or the insulation went bad. But quit crying."

"But, Bill," sobbed Wiltha, "it means that we'll never be able to swing Glaca into a stable orbit and save her. I don't even know how to control the protective screen that could keep the Patrol out."

Guthrie shot a quick glance toward the opening where the patrolmen were blasting a larger opening. Then he led the girl into the shelter of the dome beyond, careful to keep the first dome between them and the invading officers of the TPGP.

"You're spaced, Wiltha," he told her. "What if the first dome was filled with insane Sleepers? These others may be untouched. You know how that first dome was—the air foul. Something had happened to the machinery."

Wiltha's body straightened. She dashed the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand.

"I have enough serum for two more," she said. "If that fails the Reborn, my people, and Glaca are doomed."

She put her arm around Guthrie's neck and kissed him once, quickly. Then she went through the sliding outer panel of the second dome's lock as he opened it, and a moment later they were breathing the flat, but clean, air of the dome.

Wiltha smiled hopefully as she set to work. She chose two graying men, their soft couches near the dome's center, and then they sat down to wait. If this failed Guthrie realized that he would be helpless to stem the attack of the winged tanks of the Patrol. And so he stayed with the girl.

A long minute passed. The two bodies stirred and slowly came erect. The slightly slanted eyelids quivered open, blinked, and

they were looking into the sane, green-flecked eyes of the two oldsters! In this dome there had been no deterioration of brain tissues!

He looked back through the misty walls toward the broken wall of the cavern and saw tanks, a half-dozen of them, emerging from the enlarged opening. Wiltha was talking in the strange soft tongue of the Sleepers, her tone urgent, and he saw the two old men stumbling across the dome to a quadruple bank of levers, buttons and other unfamiliar equipment.

A sibilant hum built up within the dome and then faded. He thought that a pale brown fog was stealing outward from them and then he realized that his eyes had not been wrong. The brown mistiness solidified into a rubbery-appearing wall of force. And the tanks were slowly pushed back before it.

"No metal can penetrate it," Wiltha was saying, her strong slim fingers in his own. "We will reclaim the city and then arouse the other hidden Sleepers. In four days, yes, even in three, we will have jetted Glaca into a stable orbit."

Guthrie watched the second of the gray-haired Sleepers going among the sleeping men and women. The shining instrument in his hand plunged into each arm and then he moved on to the next one. The dome was already stirring into life.

"Perhaps," he suggested dryly, "you could tell me all about it. Your own sun died, perhaps, and so you made Glaca into a super spacer to cross the void?"

"It did," agreed Wiltha, "and became a dwarf star. We knew it was coming and escaped in time. But the voyage plotted was to cover many years and so the majority of our people went into domes like this to sleep.

"From this dome, every ten years, five men and women scientists went up through the tunnels to a sealed warm observatory on the surface. They watched the planet's course, ready to arouse the Sleepers if the need arose, and when their stretch was finished they awakened five others.

"We were just approaching Sol when a meteor ripped into Glaca and smashed the observatory. The three who yet lived took their pressure suits and set out for this cavern. . . . Only to have the tunnel collapse and crush them! And my mother, with her legs broken, somehow managed to reach the city again and switch on the power and light that made it liveable."

The Sleepers were spreading out now across the cavern, reviving

their fellows, and the cave brightened with increasing light as they set to work to set the rusty wheels of their civilization again in motion.

"Mother never walked again," Wiltha went on, "but after I was born she used to crawl into the tunnel and try to clear away the debris so she could reach the Sleepers. I think the whole terrible affair damaged her reasoning for she should have been able to contrive some excavating tools to clear the tunnel.

"She died when I was very young, before the sun captured Glaca, and I continued to live alone here until the ice caps melted from the uplands. Then I went down to where your space ships were landing to get help in clearing away the rocks. . . ."

Guthrie watched sleek silent machines coming out of the cavern walls and saw the gleaming rails on which they rode. He saw machines forging yet greater machines in these first few minutes of awakened life and he felt that Glaca was saved.

And with it the Reborn. The ex-criminals of the three inhabited planets, and the Sleepers, would share the vagabond planet. In time the united trio of worlds would be four, their knowledge and philosophies pooled.

"What a story, Wiltha!" exclaimed the newswireman. Her eyes were soft and warm. "And what a girl!"

* * *

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THE TWISTED MEN

BY GENE ELLERMAN

I DROVE INTO CORINTH HOLLOW, THAT APRIL AFTERNOON, WITH the fluid yellow mud of the narrow road close up to the hubs of my light truck's wheels. I drove slowly, for I hauled a ton of soybean oil meal.

It was my first delivery to the isolated little hamlet set far out there in the swampy woods and fields of that dreary bit of Western Pennsylvania, but I was familiar with the description of Corinth Hollow. The weirdly twisted, humped men who lived apart from all others there were part of the many odd collections of human misfits that have huddled together here and there across the broad face of the East. Some dwell in the shabby streets of the cities, and some, like the Twisted Men, have taken refuge in the green sanctuaries of woodland and hill.

So as I plowed down the low hill, walled-in by scrubby second growth and blackberry canes, and saw the weatherbeaten brown shells of a score of dwellings sprawled on either side of the road, I was watching curiously for the first misshapen man. For I had never seen one of them; in the two years I had worked at Jerusalem Center, six miles away, only one man had ever come to the mill. And he had been tall and straight, black-bearded and sober. His name, he told us, was Abel Marsh. . . .

A stooped, bearded old man came from the first of the houses, his feet squishing muddily as he came slowly toward my truck. As he neared me I could see that his shoulder blades were twisted and thrust upward into a great lump, and his face was drawn and, oddly, blank of emotion.

"What would thee of us?" he asked slowly, his deep voice seeming to fumble with the words.

"Got a load of soy meal for Abel Marsh," I told him.

"Ah," said the hunched man, his breath easing out as though with relief. "So few of the heathen from out in the world come thither that we regard them with suspicion." He cleared his throat

as though the slow deep drone of the toneless words had rasped it rough.

"Thou sawest the receptacles for messages at yon crossroads," he went on. "Hereafter Abel will meet thee beside them."

I remembered the cluster of mail boxes at the crossroads two miles back and the little covered platform of planks behind them. There had been milk cans resting there, three rows of six cans each.

"Suits me," I agreed. "This stretch of road is terrible. Bottom's dropped out of it."

The bearded man's glazed dark eyes seemed frozen to the middle of my zippered leather jacket. Apparently he had not listened to my words, or if he had did not care to answer me.

"The barn and house of Abel Marsh lieth third below mine," he said, his wamus-clad left arm pointing. He winced as though the motion pained him and lowered the arm quickly. "Take thy demon-propelled vehicle there. Abel will join thee directly."

The old man turned abruptly and headed back toward the house. And for the first time I saw the ugly wooden butt of what appeared to be a pistol projecting from his sagging blue wamus' pocket.

I shifted into low-low and crawled across the level bottom of the tree-rimmed hollow toward the third house. And I wondered, as the light truck growled slowly along, why that hard lump had come into the pit of my stomach and why a sudden panic made my hands unsteady and sweaty on the jerking thin circle of the wheel.

It had been the unblinking opaque darkness of the man's eyes, I thought, the hellish emptiness that a dead man come to life might possess. And even as the thought came to me I laughed harshly and put another lighted match to the dead bowl of my pipe.

Abel Marsh's house was larger and more modern than any of the others I saw as I drove into his yard. His house was two full stories high and there was a radio aerial strung between one of the twin hip-roofed barns and the house. There were electric wires as well, though no electricity came within four miles of Corinth Hollow, and then I saw the little shed that housed a gasoline motor and a pump. Marsh had connected a generator and batteries with this motor, I decided, and made his own power.

Apparently Marsh was the only man in all the backward community of Corinth Hollow who cared to sample the modern inventions of this the Twentieth Century.

A woman came to the woodshed door, a tall woman with unsmiling lips and graying braided hair. She wore a polka-dotted blue dress that reached to her ankles and her arms were covered almost to the wrists by the tight sleeves. But she was straight and her shoulders were square.

"You should not have come here," she said, not using the archaic speech of the Hollow folk. The radio probably accounted for that. "But," she went on, "since you are here you might as well unload in the barn."

She went ahead of me up the gravelled drive and swung open the barn doors of the left hand barn. Inside I saw a small orange-painted tractor and a hammermill. A slatted overhead bin held ear corn and another nearby contained oats and buckwheat—twin spouts had leaked the grain beneath them.

"Pile them here," she said, indicating the raised platform of tin-covered planks beside the grinder. "When you have finished I'll have the money ready for you."

I gave her the bill and she went back to the house. I backed the truck into the barn, a few feet from the platform, and commenced unloading.

As I worked I sensed a peculiar tightening of the muscles along the base of my scalp, a sense of being watched by hidden unfriendly eyes. I looked up quickly toward the filled mow off the the left, but could see nothing. There was a rustling of hay, however, and I wondered whether a cat or a rodent was responsible.

And then it happened. As I lifted the next-to-the-last bag of soya meal and stepped toward the heaped bags on the platform I heard an involuntary screech of terror, and the sound of hay sliding out from the bay overhead.

I dropped the bag quickly and spun about. Even as I did so the spraddled-out body of a boy thudded to the floor and lay still. A trickle of blood oozed from his nose and mouth, and one arm was twisted backward at an impossible angle.

I examined him carefully. Other than the broken arm and the bloody nose and mouth I found no broken bones. He was breathing and his pulse seemed strong. I slid my arm beneath his little back to lift him and carry him into the house, and suddenly lowered him again to the floor.

His whole back seemed to be flaccid and jellied, as though it had been pulped by the force of the impact. Yet I knew that the distance he had plunged should not have injured him so badly.

It was then that I remembered the humped backs of the men and women of Corinth Hollow. Perhaps the humps were but inherited malformations of flesh or fat. An odd thought struck me that perhaps the growths were the atrophied stubs of wings or a second set of arms.

I pulled away the faded brown shirt; rolled the little body carefully over—and gulped!

Lying there on the cloth of the little shirt, its twin slits of slanting eyes closed and its flattened nostrils panting in and out with every pulse beat, was a shapeless yellowish mass of soft-scaled life!

Shaped somewhat after the fashion of a man's head, but much larger it was, and the yellowish serpent scales of its coverings were darker only about the sunken ear pits and the slitted eyes. There were no limbs, as we know them, but twin tentacles of ropy scaled muscle that terminated in pinkish raw suction discs. The lower, mouthless fluidity of the thing was covered with dozens of similar discs.

And the boy's small back was scarred and reddened by the tiny sucking mouths that had attached them together!

"Put him down, Haskins," ordered a man's gruff voice from close beside me as I was preparing to lift the unconscious boy again.

I turned to face Abel Marsh and a half dozen of the impassive-faced twisted men of the Hollow beside him. Some of them carried pitchforks and others pieces of stovewood, but Abel Marsh had only his bare fists.

The men's empty eyes stared blankly at me and then I saw something that made the skin of my body crawl. For peering over the drooped shoulders of the hunched men, from the sheltering roof of shirt and work coat collars, flamed the slanted reddish glow of alien eyes—eyes of things like those clamped to the back of the boy!

I looked across the empty granary bin where I sat on the floor with my arms roped behind me to a post. Seated across from me on an overturned metal basket, a half-bushel measure I noticed with a remote sense, was Abel Marsh.

"I'm sorry about this, Glen," he said. He dropped the Haskins now that we were alone. "For almost a hundred and fifty years we've lived here in Corinth Hollow. We've kept to ourselves and lived peaceful. That's why we left New England, people were too curious and lived too close together."

"But Abel," I said. "What are these—these things? How did

they come to attach themselves to your people's ancestors? Where did they come from?"

"We do not refer to the other halves of our bodies as things," Abel shot back warmly. "Yes," he nodded, "I too have a Zarn on my back. A Zarn that is dwarfed. Some of the Zarns we breed from infancy for smallness for we must have contact with the outer world."

"But these Zarns," I insisted.

"We came from another place," he said slowly, "we Zarns." I noticed that he changed from the viewpoint of a man to that of a Zarn constantly. The two personalities intermingled and fused.

"We were a mighty race once," he went on. "All of America was ours, perhaps all the world. We loved ease as we grew stronger, and so we let other creatures carry us. We learned to live from the life fluid of other creatures and our digestive systems atrophied. We became as you see us today—thinking leech-like beings."

"What happened, Abel?" I wanted to know, for the moment forgetting that I was the prisoner of these unhuman masters of living flesh.

"The ice came," said the bearded man simply. "We prepared for it, sealing our eggs away in an underground cavern in what is now New England." He paused for a long moment. "I know this," he explained, "because we Zarns possess the ancestral memories of all our kind. We do not need histories, we know."

"So when your young hatched," I put in, "they found new slaves, new human animals to master!" I tried to clear the foul taste the thought brought me from my mouth.

"Not at once," he told me. "First there were animals: wolves for the younger ones, and later deer and bears. And there were Indians, but we found them hard to control so we discarded them for white men."

There was a long silence and I heard the feet of the returning hunched men, even yet I could not think of them as Zarns. They had gone out to take council over my fate. Now I feared the worst for their secret would be discovered should I be allowed to go free. The aroused witch-hunting spirit of mankind would swallow them up; yes, I confess that I too would have killed and destroyed them all at that moment.

"What will they do with me?" I cried, and I could feel the blood sucking from my cheeks and from my limbs.

The strange reddish eyes glared steadily at me over Abel Marsh's neck and shoulder. "I think that you will be permitted to live," he said. "We Zarns are merciful as your more-primitive kind have not yet learned to be. We love peace. Bloodshed is not for us. If we decide it is death we will destroy you reluctantly."

"Huh," I grunted, unbelievably under my breath.

The twisted men came into Marsh's granary. The old graybeard that I had first seen, I knew now that his name was Obed Whitlow, stood before me.

"Thee did not come to pry into our secrets," he said in his flat nasal drone. "The young son of Moses Steffin sought to see thee and hid above thy head in the hay. And he slipped to fall at thy feet. When thou tried to aid the poor lad thy eyes beheld one of us. That is forbidden." He shook his head solemnly. "But thee will not die."

"You're not going to—blind me?" I cried, fighting my bonds.

The old man said nothing in reply. "Carry him to the cavern," he commanded, and the slitted red eyes glowing so hotly over his shoulder seemed to swell until they filled all my vision. I slumped down. . . .

It was evening and I found my empty truck parked in the middle of the dirt road near the mail boxes belonging to the Corinth Hollow folk. I scented the stale odor of hard cider and my mouth tasted very peculiar. I scratched my head. I could not remember anything about my trip to Corinth Hollow; yet I must have been there—the money for the soy meal was in my jacket pocket.

I started up the truck and sent it droning toward Jerusalem Center. Funny, I thought, that I would drink enough hard cider to make me pass out on the way home, and funnier yet that I remembered nothing about my trip here.

But hard cider does odd things to a man's brain and so I dismissed the whole thing from my memory. . . . Until the last day that I saw Abel Marsh. And he told me, as we loaded his wagon beside the mail boxes, that this was to be his last purchase of feed and farmers' supplies.

The men of Corinth Hollow, directly in the path of the projected super highway that is to cut across Pennsylvania's northwestern triangle soon, were leaving their farms behind.

"We're going to Mexico or South America," he explained. "No matter exactly where. . . . Into a farming country where the curious are few."

He smiled gravely, his strange eyes empty of emotion as ever they had been, started to turn away—and then turned back abruptly.

"When you remember again," he added, "I hope you recall how kindly we dealt with you."

"What do you mean?" My mouth gaped wide, an odd chill chasing up my neck. "What'll I remember?"

Marsh shook his head, his lips twisting thinly. "Our control will fade as we travel further away. Then you will know what I mean."

His laugh was half a cough, choked. "You'll remember—and no one will believe your story should you be foolish enough to tell it."

I remember, now!

HOW HIGH ON THE LADDER—Con't from page 63

that shows Bio-adumbrator frequencies. Do you suppose——?"

"That the organisms on board tried to create a life form?" Jerry finished. "No. They haven't the skill."

"They would think they had. Remember, we instill that into the intelligence wave of their minds when we first start to breed the cultures," Peter said.

"Yes, but who ever heard of Conditioned Protoplasm trying to recreate itself," Jerry scoffed. "Why, I worked on that batch myself. They're only a mass of reflexes. A bunch of jelly designed to work a sub-cruiser and hypnotized into believing they are intelligent enough to do it."

"Yes, I guess it is absurd," Peter agreed. "Well, I'll just report them destroyed." He began to fill in a form:

*"Sub-cruiser organism Mark O-V destroyed
... region Von Heuyen's star ... reason un-
known ... probability controlling organism
died ... suggest checking culture plates for
instability ..."*

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